

Surprise: Europe rediscovers itself

by Ida Magli

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Maybe it is just a coincidence; however, it seems that this can be considered as a signal - although a small one - of a new tendency. Europe had to admit that Italy was right about the question of the Crucifix shown in public places; and a special poll among the citizens of the major Nations of the European Union showed that they are against the public use of the total veil (Burqa). These two events, of course, are quite different, but they are both very important, given the present situation of very difficult coexistence with the muslim majority of immigrants, especially as far as respect and protection of our customs and of our religious symbols are concerned. And more so, since until today the political and religious authorities, and partly the religious ones, preached the tolerance towards the foreigners, much more than the duty of being faithful to ourselves.

When the mother of two muslim students complained because of the presence of the Crucifix in their school, since it is the symbol of a different religion, the majority of the Italians - both authorities and simple citizens - understood that this was a crucial question. It was a matter of renouncing to the whole history of Europe, and to its mind-set (*forma mentis*) starting from roman antiquity to nowadays; it was a way of denying its particular sensitivity towards all what the Koran forbids: the image and the representation of the image.

In short, just to be clear, each religious faith is the expression of a People, in the same moment in which it is moulding this people. All people are different, and this is the reason why there are so many different religions. Christianity developed in the roman world, and not in the oriental one where Jesus was born, because the rule "*your word shall be yes, yes, no, no*" found in the roman world the resonance and the

analogies that could not to be found in any other part of the world. And also because the poetic beauty which imbues the Gospel could be absorbed and appropriated only by the Country of Beauty *par excellence*.

Muslims are asking to remove the Crucifix from public places not only because it is a religious symbol, but because it is a "representation". The fact that the request of the Italian Government was accepted shows how important are the values at stake: the human value of the concept of "representation" itself, and the whole intellectual and religious history of Europe.

The concurrence of the result of the poll about the burqa - as we said before - in a way is showing a change of disposition. The excessive increase of the number of immigrants, and the psychological and physical pressure exerted in our territory by their presence, surely had a great importance in inducing europeans to change their minds; until very recent times, they were willing to be very tolerant towards foreign customs. But tolerance is easy when you do not feel in danger; now, with a sudden acceleration, we have reached the maximum alert level, because the European Union was enlarged to include so many countries which were completely unknown; we never thought we had to coexist with them.

The loss of a "boundary horizon" gives us a feeling of fragility, of awe and emptiness, that nothing can compensate. A People is like an individual: needs a house and a closing door on its front. The poll was made in the founding nations of the European Union, those who realized that the initial project - which was originally limited to five nations only - vanished because of the "enlargement", and now are suffering more deeply its alienating effects.

There is one more thing to add: the european hypersensitivity towards the status of women, especially when - as in the case of the veil that completely hides the face - we see a signal of difference and of intolerable oppression. In Europe the freedom of women, of every woman, cannot be put into discussion. It is a right that was obtained with great awareness, and it also is the result of a great effort made by men. It is not possible to ask us not to defend women from oppression.

Ida Magli

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traduzione di Marina Mascetti