

Congress of Together for Europe
Munich, 1st July 2016

EUROPE TODAY: THE NEW COMMANDMENT CREATES A CULTURE OF FELLOWSHIP

Maria Voce

The early stages of “Together for Europe” were intertwined with the beginning of this new century, marked by the hope of achieving the so-called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): to end hunger; to ensure education, health and progress for all; to reverse the consequences of pollution, and so on. They are all goals that are far from being achieved.

During these few years we have seen instead the rise and development of global terrorism, together with an escalation of wars in countries bordering the Mediterranean, massive migrations, and growing intolerance.

All this has had a big impact on Europe: there have been attacks in capital cities, borders have been closed, freedom lost. Welfare – a European symbol of equality – is in decay, values are being violated, there is a feeling of inadequacy, the fear of losing our way as a civilization, and anguish about what the future will bring.

Almost 60 years after the Treaty of Rome, it seems that our continent is being pushed more in the direction of disintegration than closer European integration.

There are new localisms, nationalisms and communitarianisms, based not only and not so much on ethnicity and narratives regarding history and identity, but on an unwillingness to include and share. It is paradoxical that the new Europe, which arose out of the demolition of the Berlin Wall, should be tempted, through fear, to shut itself behind new fences, building new walls and fences, in the illusion of being able to stop history that is once again knocking at its doors.

The single currency project was supposed to be a big new step towards political union, a great new identifying moment in which solidarity and the sharing of sovereignty, in order to achieve common objectives, were to represent the fundamental pillars.

Actually two examples show us how little this has been achieved. On the one hand, the serious delays and heated debates that followed the Greek debt crisis, which greatly undermined the foundations of solidarity among the member states, even leading to speculation on Greece leaving the Euro. On the other hand there is the Brexit issue and other separatist tendencies which also test solidarity severely. Because going out of the Union is not like leaving a club, but is equivalent to, and much more like, abandoning partners with whom we no longer share the same reason for being together: the founding pact.

Europe is going through the dark night of its own principles, the dark night of its dreams. In reality, a great sense of disorientation reigns in our continent because of the presence of three simultaneous crises: an unprecedented migratory crisis, together with a deep economic crisis, against the backdrop of a demographic crisis.

While leaving it to others to analyse the reasons for these crises, I believe that the deeper causes of Europe's weakness today can be found in the denial of God and of the transcendent. This is a result of the gradual emergence and spread of secular culture which wants to do away with any link with the supernatural. In the search for total freedom, Europe no longer recognizes that its culture was formed through 2,000 years of Christian tradition. Denying this means cutting its own roots and finding itself like a lifeless tree.

So is everything collapsing then? Is the continent's dream of unity being shattered?

No. We are here together, as Christian movements and communities in Europe, because we believe there is something that does not collapse. It is love; God who is Love.

Our movements are bearers of charisms which are certainly very different from each other and yet all are the work of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is precisely the one who creates fraternity (so to speak) among the Persons of the Trinity and who unites all Christians. So the idea of fraternity originates in Heaven and is the purpose of life on earth.

All of us can bear witness that we met Christ one day and let ourselves be fascinated and drawn into his Gospel. Living his words led us to change ourselves and reach out to others, building relationships of gospel love and thereby creating communities that become leaven wherever they are. We have discovered a new willingness to be open to all, crossing the boundaries between Churches, between religions, between ethnicities and cultures, in a 360-degree dialogue, until we rediscover everyone as our brothers and sisters.

In this way we have found the root of our European culture once more and, on this foundation, we have tried to interpret our present times, which concern the entire planet and all humankind as never before, from the perspective of moving towards a united world.

In fact, applying the ideals of peace, justice, freedom and equality today means having a universal dimension, which fraternity makes possible.

We need to nurture a conscious and responsible vision for the future; one where there is creative integration, in which identities are not forgotten but can grow together, be enriched and work for a more just and equitable world. We must go beyond a paradigm of security understood as entrenchment and rejection, which is a false security, to enter into a wider framework of "human security", that is, a security that gives priority to people and their destiny, the preservation of life, the prospect of hope.

This creative integration can also be seen sketched out in the network of our movements. We are all God's children, who are united and distinct, and bound by mutual love which generates the presence of God among us; ("Where two or more are united in my name, I am there among them." Mt 18:20). He is the greatest gift this network of movements and communities can make to Europe. This is our answer: the Risen Lord among us, who consoles, revives and renews through our charisms.

We believe Together for Europe is something which can inspire individuals or associations in their commitment to a free, reconciled, democratic, supportive and fraternal Europe. Not an "old" continent, but a living and lively continent, which discovers it has a project to accomplish and that it can be a gift for the rest of humanity.

I would like to end with Pope Francis' words to the European Parliament in November 2014: "The time has come for us to abandon the idea of a Europe which is fearful and self-absorbed, in order to revive and encourage a Europe of leadership, a repository of science, art, music,

human values and faith as well. A Europe which contemplates the heavens and pursues lofty ideals. A Europe which cares for, defends and protects man, every man and woman. A Europe which bestrides the earth surely and securely, a precious point of reference for all humanity!”