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Europe: Ideal or idol worship?

Rimini, August 24th, 2014 – “Within every ideal is hidden the risk of idol worship,” said Joseph H.H. Weiler, President of the European University Institute, at the opening of his event on the theme “Europe: ideal or idol worship?” held in the Aula Neri at 5 p.m. The speaker, a professor at Harvard University, along with Andrea Simoncini, Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Florence, discussed about Julià Carrò’s message on “Europe 2014. Is a new beginning possible?”, wrote in the occasion of the last European elections.

Weiler underlined that the main ideals of the E.U. are peace, prosperity and welcoming the other. These values, however, are subject to idolization. Peace can become a convention based on utility, without any authentic spirit of forgiveness; embracing success can be turned into prosperity without solidarity and acceptance, an integration without embracing the cultural identity of the other. The words of Jean Monnet, one of the E.U. founders, are significant here: “Don’t make States coalitions, but a unity of people.”

In the same way, another type of idol worship, according to Weiler, “is emphasizing human rights, forgetting to interiorize their corresponding duties.” The proliferation of new rights is another limitation to freedom. In paying attention only to our claims while leaving behind our neighbor’s needs, even the value of the human being is at risk of becoming a self-serving idol.

Weiler, a practicing Jew (and co-director of the Tikvah Centre of Jewish Law and Civilization), doesn’t have problem admitting that the value of solidarity, as it has been understood by the E.U. founders, is based on the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, which cultivates a concern for one’s responsibility to others. Starting from this awareness, the American jurist criticized the current inclination of European citizens to shrink responsibility, designating social politics to the law and to the government. Essentially, said Weiler, “we wait too long, thinking that the E.U. is the savior of all or, when things go wrong, that it is responsible for all our miseries.”

With respect to the commitment of the religious believer in public life, Weiler underlined the importance of giving reasoned arguments in order to defend ethical values, and avoid reference to Revelation. At the same time, he highlighted the value of the testimony of one’s faith in the particular social and political context, in which we are all called to operate. Both on the personal and collective level, whether in Europe or internationally, “the solution for everyday life problems,” said Simoncini, citing don Giussani, “doesn’t come from facing problems directly, but from a deeper awareness of the nature of the subject which faces them”.

(C.S., F.Pi.)



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