



#meeting14

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Story of a Carnal Soul. 100 Years after the Death of Charles Péguy

Rimini, August 24, 2014 – The presentation of the exhibit dedicated to Charles Péguy was held at 5 pm at ENI caffè letterario. The discussion between Costantino Esposito, Professor of History of Philosophy at the University of Bari, and the poet Davide Rondoni, was moderated by the journalist Pigi Colognesi, who is curator of the exhibit. One of the motivations for this exhibit, Colognesi explained, is the desire to communicate that Péguy provides a crucial view-point through which to understand the value of hope in a historical moment in which hope is scarce. The very title of the presentation is emblematic. The “carnal soul” evokes the concept of the “sublime manifestation of the eternal in the ephemeral and the ephemeral in the eternal”.

The exhibit divides the author’s life into four parts. The first part, “For the harmonious city,” describes the humanistic socialism for which the author was a standard bearer, up to its open support to Dreyfus. The second part, “Beyond the modern world,” examines his critiques of the ideological, political, literary, pedagogical, and theoretical corruptions of his time. The third session “from Gethsemane” takes its inspiration from “Dialogue between History and the Carnal Soul”, which remained unfinished at the time of the author’s death and was published only in 1955. The last session “The road to Chartres,” makes reference to the touching devotion Péguy had for Mary. He in fact promoted several pilgrimages to the Gothic cathedral, describing it as the “place in the world where everything becomes easy”.

Esposito began his talk by saying that “Péguy’s is a thinking heart,” and providing insights into the author’s philosophical approach. According to Esposito, our thought can only welcome reality, but cannot create it. Thus, events are the perfect connection between human reason and reality. He then proposed the analysis of becoming and of the continuous growth of being, up to the need for reflection on the necessity of opening ourselves up to reality and welcoming it with order and method. Analogous to the “mechanism of grace,” an open soul allows divine intervention to the point that when our humanity is not present, even God is not present.

Rondoni concluded with a discussion of the French writer’s poetic side. “Leopardi reminds us,” said Rondoni, “that there is a meaning to beauty and truth. Art expresses the meaning of truth, and in it resounds our existential heritage.” Poets, according to Rondoni, use grammatically incorrect words, which are nevertheless correct in describing experience, “and Péguy was a master of this art.” Rondoni read an evocative piece from “The Mystery of the Holy Innocents,” generating a round of applause in the large audience. He concluded his talk by quoting Fr. Giussani: “Only someone who has experienced nothingness can speak about being.”

(C.R., L.T.)

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