



#meeting14

**Press Release n. 101**  
35th Edition  
Meeting for Friendship amongst People  
#meeting14

**Public Life: Justice and Gratuitousness**

**Rimini, August 28, 2014** – This was a great moment of dialogue and work for the attendees of the session held in the Intesa Sanpaolo Auditorium at 5 pm. On stage, Luciano Violante, President Emeritus of the Italian Chamber of the Deputies and Javier Prades López, Dean of San Dámaso Theological University in Madrid, Spain, discussed about the role of justice and gratuitousness in public life. The moderator Lorenza Violini, Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Milan, after having quoted Heidegger (“Modern world is characterized by complete interchange”), pointed out an alternative: “In front of reality there are two possible approaches: gratitude or resentment. What prevails in the modern world is resentment.

Violante, who (as Violini revealed) had the merit to propose the title of this session and suggest a name for the other panelist, began with this realization: “In Italy, like in the other Western countries, the law of financial capitalism – for which everything can be negotiated and monetized – prevails in politics, morals and religion. When this happens, people tend to act according to egotistical interests, breaking any possible social tie.” Violante continued by saying: “A person, a family and a nation cannot be saved if they don’t affirm something that cannot be sold nor bought. Gratuitousness sets a limit to this mentality.”

Prades López remarked that “one of the reasons leading to the refusal of the logic of gratuitousness is the evil, both done and suffered. The world we live in appears to be incompatible with the concept of original goodness of life.” He continued, by pointing out another reason for this logic: “In the Western world, the concept that we are entitled to everything and that gratuitousness is incompatible with the dignity of an adult became common ground.” This occurred both in the political and the juridical fields (limited by the ‘social contract’ perspective), and in theology (with the concept of ‘pure and good nature’), as well as in the Catholic culture: “The concept of ‘merit’ also influenced the core of one’s relationship with God, turning it into mere negotiation.”

Luciano Violante went on analyzing the word ‘gratuitousness’, by starting from the quotation of a passage from the Gospel of Matthew: “You received without cost, give without cost”. For him, these words show how gratuitousness cannot be explained from the outside, because it doesn’t have a price, but can only be explained from within oneself: “Gratuitousness expresses an overflowing value and represents the boundary needed to limit the negotiation approach proper to the market logic.” From this point, he moved his reflection onto two other terms, which according to him, are crucial: rights and obligations. “Democracy would not exist without rights, but a democracy would fall into pieces if there were only rights and no obligations.” He then introduced the theme of reconciliation “something we cannot ask from the mere mechanisms of justice”.

What emerged from the panel discussion was that the two terms used in the title of this session (i.e., gratuitousness and justice) are bound by a deep link. If this link is not perceived, a lot of damage can ensue. Why are these terms so connected? Prades answered: “Because they both express our human elementary experience, two original needs of our heart.” He then quotes a song by Giorgio Gaber who describes the “illogical happiness” that suddenly surprises him one morning, at sunrise, while driving along the highway.



#meeting14

By doing this, Prades insisted on the need to: “wonder about experience.” Even the people who experienced the most terrible conditions (here Prades quoted Fr. Maximilian Kolbe) were witnesses to the positivity of life. On the other hand, irreparable damage caused to innocent people demands “a broader outlook, at the threshold of gratuitousness”, that need perceived by the lay philosopher Habermas, when describing that “longing for a resurrection.”

Violante then quotes some examples in history in which the link between justice and gratuitousness was able to produce reconciliation: the amnesty granted in 1946 by Palmiro Togliatti, the Attorney General at the time, despite the opposition within his party (the Communist Party); the refusal, in 1953, of Prime Minister De Gasperi to recount electoral votes. The recount may have allowed his party to win the election, but would have divided the country in two. An example, in recent years, is the possibility offered to terrorists detained in different prisons to meet together and reflect on their experience and its contradiction. The result of such an initiative allowed for a public self-criticism and admission of guilt by the terrorists.

In his conclusion, Prades remarked that “democratic formal procedures are not enough to save society:” this can survive only in as much as a pre-political context of values exists. “We need to be able to meet people and contexts where gratuitousness is truly lived,” added the panelist. After having quoted the statement of the protagonist of ‘Unforgiven’ by Clint Eastwood (“I’m a new person, I’m different. You changed me”), Prades concluded by saying: “I wish there will always be in our life that presence who decides to live our life so deeply that will make us change.”

(C.B., V.C.)

**Stefano Pichi Sermolli**

Meeting Spokesperson, Head of the Press&Communication Office

Press Office: Erika Elleri

Tel: [+39/348.0138786](tel:+393480138786)

E-mail: [erika.elleri@meetingrimini.org](mailto:erika.elleri@meetingrimini.org)