
Italian Bishops' meeting on the Mediterranean. Card. Angelo Bagnasco (CCEE): "Europe, do not become insensitive, don't turn a blind eye"

"If the tree is known by its own fruit, I do not see today's individualistic culture as generating happier men and more supportive and liveable societies. Rather, it creates greater and unbearable loneliness." The reflection of Card. **Angelo Bagnasco**, Archbishop of Genoa, President of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE), ahead of the Meeting "Mediterranean frontier of peace" that will bring together in Bari the Catholic bishops of the countries bordering the Mediterranean from 19 to 23 February, starts from a deep examination of what Europe is doing to itself and consequently to the rest of the world. **This meeting is taking place at a complex moment in time. Your Eminence, what worries the European Churches most?** They are concerned about the darkening of Light, hence the uncertainty of life and man's disorientation. The light is Christ: God cannot dim, but in the human heart barriers can be raised which prevent light from illuminating human conscience and warming people's hearts. The darkening of the faith can also affect peoples, to the extent that they no longer recognize their spiritual and moral root: when this happens, society grows frightened and bends back on itself. **The Mediterranean has become the exact opposite of the "great lake of Tiberias", according to Giorgio La Pira's definition. Over the years, we saw a rise of populist and sovereignist forces in Europe that exert a strong influence on public opinion. Is it possible to be Christian and sovereignist?**

'People' is a serious term, populism is a pathology that deludes the people and betrays them.

The same applies to the sovereignty of a people with respect to sovereignism. "Isms" tend to proclaim themselves superior and close themselves off to others. Christians know that their true face was given to them by God: they are created and redeemed in Christ. Hence they have the dignity of a son of God and brother, they discover in others the face of the Face of the Creator, the reflection of the Icon of Jesus. Starting from this given reality, the Christian faithful engage in dialogue with everyone without fear or complexes, without claims to superiority and without minimalism, in a relationship of truth, love and justice that signifies reciprocity. This also applies to peoples and States. **"Invasion" has become Europe's rallying cry. Images of desperate people stranded at sea no longer touch people's hearts. Rescues are seen with suspicion. Countries are fighting over who should open the ports and who should not. Your Eminence, what is happening to Europe's "soul"?**

Europe must not lose its soul. If Europe darkens the Christian faith, it loses its very essence. It's self-evident!

The fundamental values of all times, respect for others, care for the needy, the primacy of the human person, the promotion of human life in all circumstances, of the family, educational commitment, gratuitousness, cannot be sustained for long if they are detached from their source, which is God. The good will of individuals and States thus becomes insufficient. To speak of values without speaking of the Gospel means not understanding that, without the original source, sooner or later there will be no water. Recognising the origin of things and behaviours is not an archaeological artefact but an existential memory: it enables us not to lose our bearings, to know our goal and not to distort - along the way - our way of life, moral sensitivity, conscience and values. Indeed, it is possible to become insensitive to the suffering of others, it is possible to play down evil, to turn a blind eye before hundreds of refugees on journeys of despair, hoping for a decent and better future, a land of

peace and of peaceful and industrious coexistence.

The Gospel is clear and it cannot be changed according to fashion or convenience: those who speculate on the misery and fear of others, for whatever reason, lose their humanity.

Europe must establish a serious policy that tackles the phenomenon of migration, without hypocrisy and disguised interests: every person has inherent dignity, and they cannot be used as an 'expedient' for something else. **What can the Churches realistically do?** The Church is entrusted with fidelity to the Gospel, source of salvation and redeemed humanism. This means at least two things. To put into practice in the Christian communities the Gospel value of welcoming and integrating all those who leave their homeland in search of a future of work, justice and peace. Christian communities are making a great contribution. Secondly, the Church must form consciences in the light of the Gospel, which includes individual consciences and the collective consciences of States. In this twofold perspective, the Church is a prophecy for the Continent, a catalyst for the leaders of Nations to ensure that the path of unity is the path of a family of peoples who establish fair and effective policies to deal with practical problems while truly respecting the innermost values of peoples and traditions, relating to life, love, freedom, family and death. Without interference. There must be a substantial equality of Nations and responsibilities commensurate with the real forces of all, with no claim to superiority. **Arms trafficking and armed conflicts, which many European countries are responsible for, are among the primary causes of the flight of migrants. How can peace be restored?** As the Holy Father reminds us, the way to peace is justice, that is to say, recognising the inalienable dignity of every human being and every people. We are far from achieving justice because we are moving away from Christ, the Prince of Peace. The flight of so many honest migrants is a consequence of this. History has shown that every war - in whatever way it occurs - is a source of profit for some and of political power for others, a tragedy for many poor and defenceless people. Europe is no exception. Staging peace meetings and talks without following the paths of justice strikes me as a major, unbearable hypocrisy. The world is unbalanced between increased wealth for the few and exponential poverty for the multitudes. This is happening at continental and national level alike. For example, why are we conquering outer space and not reclaiming deserts or waters? Why do we continue plundering the resources of other countries, making them increasingly poverty-stricken and dependent? Why do we compete to accumulate raw materials at all costs? Why - in finance - is maximum profit pursued in the minimum time?

Justice is proclaimed and injustice is perpetrated. War and violence are consequences of this.

The final statement of the Permanent Council states that Bari intends to offer "a prophetic gaze." Which then is the "Word" of the Churches for the Mediterranean? To overcome falsehood and return to the truth. The full and definitive truth is Christ, Way, Truth and Life. In Him every fragment of truth has its foundation, reason and orientation. This is the Christian faith that we would like to shine forth "to the farthest corners of the globe"! Yet, there is also what can be called a "secular" approach to the Gospel, meaning that the great aspirations of the human heart - such as happiness, life, justice and peace - find definition, fullness and hope in the Gospel. This is what I mean by returning to the truth. We need to break away from the lie of ideologies, the fear of God, distrust of others perceived as enemies. The shining forth of Divine Truth from the Lord illuminates fraternal and supportive humanity that is just and at peace. A continuous conversion of hearts is needed. For no one is master of others, not even of himself, and earthly life is not everything; power and wealth are values but not idols, they are not ends but service to humanity. One day we will have to account for what we have done or not done for the good of all.

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