

INTERVIEW

Crepaldi: Europeanism is an ideology to combat

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With the European Parliament elections about a month away, there is a growing feeling that this is a particularly important appointment. In this interview, Monsignor Giampaolo Crepaldi, bishop emeritus of Trieste, who in the past had long headed the Caritas in veritate commission of the CCEE (Council of European Bishops' Conferences), warns, however, against the European 'dream' becoming ideological Europeanism.

Elections for the European Parliament take place 6-9 June 2024. Do you agree that for a number of reasons they will be particularly important this time?

Certainly there are doubts about the voter turnout, which has never been very high in the past. Nonetheless, evaluating all the issues on the table, I believe that this election round is certainly more important than others in the past. The European Union has not proved itself recently. Many had pointed out the serious flaws of the European Green Deal, but they were not listened to. Climate and energy transition policies have been centralist, costly, ineffective and illusory, provoking reactions of rejection. The recent parliamentary vote on abortion as a fundamental right highlighted that parliament is controlled by a destructive and hopeless ideology. The meddling of EU institutions in the Polish parliamentary elections and the pressure against decisions made by the government of Hungary, a nation that is often treated as 'alien' to the Union, are some aspects of a situation of clear crisis. Add to this its considerable foreign policy failures.

Do you foresee major changes in the composition of the European Parliament or just minor adjustments?

Recently, there have been elections results in some European countries that are strongly opposed to this European Union. I am referring to the elections in some German States and especially in the Netherlands. Based on this trend, some observers even estimate a shift of a hundred seats in the next European parliament. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make predictions. I will limit my judgement to say that there will probably be a polarisation of the parliament composition, a sign that the future of the European Union will not be straightforward, but rather arduous. This polarisation will mainly concern this aspect: a slow down or even reduction of the transfer of sovereignty of states or, on the contrary, accelerate unification.

Mario Draghi recently anticipated some of the contents of the report he drafted on behalf of European Commission President Ursula Von der Layen. What is your assessment of them?

I think that Mario Draghi is not only speaking in a personal capacity, but also on behalf of various circles of power, financial, economic and political, with which he is connected. His speech should therefore be assessed carefully. It seems to me that it is in the

perspective of a quick and decisive strengthening of the Union with the prospect of the birth of a central state, the creation of a common debt, European rearmament and the continuation of the environmental and digital transition. He spoke of the need for a 'turning point', but it seems to me that his proposal is in continuity with current trends, which he would like to radicalise and speed up by moving towards a new European 'sovereignty'.

What would the Social Doctrine of the Church have to say about this?

Anyone wishing to refer to the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church would have to assess similar objectives very critically. The project would annihilate natural communities, from family to local communities up to nations, and create a super-state even more distant from citizens and organic communities than the institutions of the Union are today. The continuation of the current transitions in the hands of such a Leviathan could create a centralised system of population control endangering the very freedom which European democracies so considerably, and even excessively, put forward as their main value. Not to mention that financing green and digital transitions would require immense resources and interventions encroaching on private property rights. Issues that now remain - at least formally - the responsibility of the states would become a central competence and, to give an example, in the field of education we could witness a 'pedagogy of the masses', as some experts call it, governed by central power. A kind of flattening and homologation of citizens' minds to Europeanism as an ideology.

Are you more in favour of the alternative line, that of cooling unitary processes?

I believe that at this time it would be more opportune to slow down the unification processes, to evaluate the course taken so far, to rediscover culturally what is essential to Europe and what the unification of the European Union has so far lost or neglected. There is a need to stop the race and think more.

Are you also referring to the Christian heritage?

I am referring to many things, to Christian heritage, to the family, to the preservation of national cultures, to the subsidiary dislocation of political power, to the management of migrations that the Union has not even managed to set up, to the value of traditions, to freedoms managed from the base, to the self-organisation of local communities, to the preservation of so many identities that have been lost without anyone being able to say why, up to a more calibrated geo-strategic reflection.

As for the Christian heritage, allow me to make a couple of observations. The culture of

the European Union is essentially atheistic and anti-Christian, hidden behind the principle of religious freedom. Acknowledging this, however, it must also be said that a reevaluation of Christianity cannot take place for 'historical' reasons, i.e. just because it is part of our past. This is not a sufficient reason, because anyone will be able to say that that past is now in the past. It will have to be based on the 'truth' of the Christian religion, i.e. on a new awareness that European political life in turn needs it to be true.

Surely, this is where the responsibility of the Catholic Church lies...

Certainly, because it is above all her task to show the truth of the Christian religion, a truth that is the ultimate reason for her claims to be valid in public and not only in private. I have to say that on this point there are more than a few difficulties today. The Church, even recently, has maintained that secularity is the ideal place for encounter, dialogue and peace. But if this is so, the Christian religion becomes one of many ethical instances and the Church one of many agencies of civic formation. The principle of freedom of religion must not conflict with the Catholic Church's claim to have something of its own and unique to say and do. The reason for the historical, public, social and political role of the Catholic Church cannot only be the right to religious freedom. Benedict XVI had explored this topic in depth, and his remarks had aroused great interest even in secular thought, but I have the impression that it has not been continued.

In your opinion, what is the main deficiency in the Catholic Church's view of the European Union?

I would say it is the acceptance of the European project as an unquestionable a priori, valid in itself, to be collaborated with but without strong proposals, without denouncing the main errors. Let us not forget that Europeanism can also be an ideology when it places itself above everything else. In a recent document in view of the June elections, for example, the bishops of Comece, the Commission of the European Bishops' Conferences of the Nations of the Union, limited themselves to inviting participation and saying that the pro-European project is valid and should be helped to develop. This seems too little. I also note another weakness with regard to the so-called founding fathers of the European Community that later became the European Union. The Catholic faith of the three founding fathers is exalted too much, to the point that the whole process that followed, including the situation today, is considered Catholic. It is not correct to set things along a forced line of continuity with a certain early Catholicism. Moreover, this may overshadow the fact that at the origins of the Union there is also the Ventotene Manifesto, which has a very different ideological tenor and which today seems to be winning.