

Book: Addio Ragazzo di Luce

Farewell speeches and homilies by Father van Kilsdonk s.j. to homosexual victims of the AIDS
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WHY THIS BOOK IN ITALY

Presentation of the Italian edition

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Listening and respect. Two keywords. The pivot on which the whole relationship with the homosexual world is built by a famous Dutch priest, Father Van Kilsdonk s.j.. A relation of great care, feeling, proximity, up to the participation in the suffering of those affected by the AIDS disease and to the accompaniment in the last farewell. Listening and respect, therefore, as a condition for the better understanding; to process, on the one hand, a deep theological, moral, social reflection on the complex phenomenon of homosexuality and, on the other, to prove with facts marked by a particular kind of behavior the highest of the civic virtues: that of human solidarity.

This is the main lesson of the book that Eurispes contributes to present and disseminate in Italy. It's our deep conviction that this message coming from The Netherlands, because the wealth of cultural and human values it expresses, with his reflections as well as the reference to specific experiences, will contribute to act for the better in a historical period of our society in which general rising trends are recorded at the closure in themselves, indifference, superficiality in thoughts and behaviors. A contradictory stage in which Italian society certainly continues to express spread values and initiatives of great human solidarity but also, conversely, dangerous phenomena of hostility and closing towards otherness. Also in Italy, in short, we are facing the real risk of seeing erecting those "walls", that recall the warning of La Pira, and those barriers that unfortunately are currently being built in much of Europe. It is just with reference to this regressive process that for the book of the Dutch father, as a synthesis of his thought and experience, we have chosen an accurate subtitle: "break down the walls of indifference".

The first Report about the homosexual condition in Italy realized by Eurispes dates back to 1989. Still today that survey, carried out by analyzing the responses from 2,044 homosexuals, remains an important point of reference for dealing with issues related to this specific universe. Since that time, this research process was developed by the Institute over the years through studies, continuous monitoring of the evolution of the phenomenon with periodic sample surveys, aware that, today,

the homosexual question still remains an open issue not only in our country but also internationally.

In 1989, it was necessary to give a first, valid cognitive contribution to a social phenomenon that was often treated with disdain, or open irony, or even worse, with clear bad intent, in any case drawing on the endless reservoir of banalities that everyone feels entitled to quote. The Report, in short, was the first in-depth study document against the stupid stereotypes. And its importance was fully asserted in the following years when, because of the dramatic events linked to the spread of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the need emerged to work on this problem without the distorting lens of the prejudice; a way, we stressed, to contribute to the civil growth of the Italian society.

Researches and studies, during the following years, have confirmed a great evolution in the mentality and approach by the Italians to the homosexuality phenomenon. It is a fact that the cultural, ethical, social reference' values are profoundly changed. Twenty years after the first research, for example, in the Italy Report 2009 (Rapporto Italia 2009), a survey conducted on a highly representative sample, pointed out that for the majority of Italians (52.5%) homosexuality was considered a form of love like heterosexuality, while a third (33.3%) claimed to be able to tolerate it only if not ostentatious, and only one Italian out of ten (9.3%) called it an immoral condition. The recognition of equivalence between the two forms of love, homosexual and heterosexual, can be considered a turning point, in the mentality of the Italians, which has continued to strengthen, albeit slowly, in the following years. It's interesting to note that in 2009, the majority of Italians (53.5%) declared the acceptance in the case that their son confesses to be homosexual and that an even larger majority (58.9%) was in favor of a form of legal recognition of homosexual unions (instead more than a third, accounting for 35.9%, declared their opposition to any kind of recognition). In summary, regarding this social phenomenon, there is no doubt that the first decade of the century marked a big change in Italian society.

A further study conducted in the Italy Report 2015 has however highlighted how this kind of issue, linked to the regulation of some areas of the private sphere and the relationality between individuals, is still a matter of deep contrasts. Surveys have confirmed, for example, that compared to previous years, all collected data show a sign of regressive trend, and attest a decrease of the opening to the new sensibilities, which are a widespread heritage of the most advanced societies with which Italy compares. "In addition to the economic and structural - Eurispes states - this too is likely to become a hardly curable gap". A case for all is concerning the rights of homosexuals: the percentage of Italians (50.7%) which in 2014 declared his opposition to the possibility of contracting marriage between people of the same sex has increased in 2015 up to 59.2%, although there was a broad consensus

(64.4%) on the opportunity to promote the legal protection of unmarried couples, regardless of gender. A strong closing there is also about the possibility of adoption by homosexual couples. It is clear that these currents of thoughts are intertwined, for example, with those related to the idea of family that Italians have, to the set up of its structure and to its social function.

It is, therefore, in this Italian scenario, still very problematic, that Eurispes proposes the reflection and the experience of the Dutch priest. Certain to contribute at least to deepening the knowledge of the phenomenon and to promote in any case, however and wherever, the ethics of solidarity between the people of our time. The research working learned us to be cautious in the judgments and especially to motivate them, as much as possible, with careful documentation. The book by van Kilsdonk, that we present to the Italians, wants to be a stimulus for all to operate in this dual direction, of ethics and knowledge.

Gian Maria Fara