

Laudatio in honour of Professor Dr. Andrea Riccardi

Aachen

21 May 2009

It is a joy and a privilege for me to deliver this Laudatio in honour of Professor Dr. Andrea Riccardi this year's recipient of the Karlspreis. He is a man of special merit and remarkable personal depth. Permit me as an Irish European to use an Irish image. The shamrock with its three leaves was used by Ireland's patron saint, Saint Patrick, to illustrate the divine unity of the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This image assists me today to illuminate three qualities of the person we honour. Andrea Riccardi the academic is a man of **research** and letters, an historian and a prolific author. He is a man of **civil engagement** who founded the Community of Sant' Egidio which counts among its membership today sixty thousand volunteers in seventy states, including more than twenty African states. He is a man imbued with a deep sense of **faith** who while still at school in the student revolutionary days of the late 1960s took a road less travelled at that time and, metaphorically, arming himself with a bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other opted for that rich fusion of faith and action that has characterised his entire adult life. Research, voluntary civil engagement and faith are the three illuminated leaves of Dr. Riccardi's shamrock that find unity of expression in his life and work.

We live in a world today that paradoxically is characterised simultaneously both by the rise of individualism and the growth of interdependence. In no small part this new self confidence and self assertion by individuals is the positive product of higher living standards, greater access to education, media, communications, travel and technology. Equally none is immune from the powerful forces of globalisation positive and negative, the information and communications revolution, the

greening of the global agenda and the rise of new 21st century powers. These forces both individual and global have changed the landscape for all who survey it, faith communities included. Lifestyle choices both in terms of consumption and production connect individual action to global outcomes for better and for worse in ways that are better understood and more widely appreciated than before. Creation within us and us within creation and the interdependence between the two is one of the great themes of our times. It connects the local to the global. It recalls that no man is an island but is part of the whole. Like never before it links individual responsibility and behaviour to global consequences.

In the framework of a holistic approach to values in action, pioneered with great foresight for the past four decades by Professor Riccardi and his colleagues, it is a promising window of opportunity opening onto the soul of today's generation, not least our young. We may be more individualistic in terms of prevailing cultural norms but instinctively we understand interdependence better than any earlier generation. This complex but balanced equation which mirrors the world we live in and share can be both an opportunity and a hope for the future. It is an invitation to reach the person within the better to reach out to the wider world. Reaching the inner person is possible by many means but it remains one of the intrinsic strengths of all organised religions. Openness to listening to the voices of the better angels of our human nature has been a hallmark of the vocation of the Community of Sant' Egidio, a faith based response that recognises the centrality of individual responsibility and voluntary action. It is a mission that has been the life's work of this year's Karlspreis laureate. It is a testament to values in action that stands as a powerful contrast and antidote to the self interested cynicism and downright greed that has precipitated so much of our current global economic crisis.

In his book entitled 'An Intimate History of Humanity' Theodore Zeldin wrote: 'Compassion has only been a truly

powerful force when it has been felt for a particular individual, by an individual. All efforts to organise it as a system, in which everyone is treated equally, have spread it so thinly as to render it invisible'. The Basilica of Santa Maria di Trestevere in Rome, home to the Community of Sant' Egidio, is a modern day manger of true compassion whose open doors to the poor, the sick and the marginalised and to those from the wider world in search of peace and reconciliation is a true exemplar of the value and values embodied in Professor Riccardi's sense of volunteerism as 'personal communication, heart to heart, which creates bonds of brotherhood inspired by the Spirit'.

This concept of the bond of brotherhood and universal fraternity has extended Dr. Riccardi's research, publications and activities to embrace the themes of Euro-African relations and Inter Faith Dialogue. In his recent publication 'Convivere', 'Living Together', he focuses on an art of co-existence that neither abandons our identity nor fears what makes us different, noting that the world has become multi-polar offering a pathway to the co-existence of civilisations. This is, he says, 'the fruit of political realism and religious and human hope'. It is the antithesis of Huntington's widely publicised theory of the Clash of Civilisations and an altogether more hopeful perspective, better placed, in my view, to inform and animate the European Union's emerging Common Foreign and Security Policy in this sensitive but vital policy domain.

We gather today in Aachen in the light of the forthcoming direct elections to the European Parliament, the seventh such elections. The European Union is challenged by the depth and severity of the global financial and economic crisis and its social and economic consequences; by the need, not least in Ireland, to bring closure to the unfinished reform process embodied by the Lisbon Treaty and by the growth in popular indifference as observed by the decline in voter participation in European Parliament elections, a phenomenon unfortunately predicted to continue and deepen on this occasion. This trend recalls to my

mind a good friend and a great European who has passed away since last we met in Aachen. I refer to the late Professor Bronislaw Geremek, the winner of the Karlspreis in 1998. Paraphrasing the Conte di Cavour who remarked after Italian unification 'Italia è fatta, ora dobbiamo fare gli Italiani', (Italy is made now we must make the Italians'), Geremek said: 'We have made Europe, now we must find her Europeans'. For the sake of enduring legitimacy this is a central strategic challenge in the years ahead for the European Union and its political leaders and institutions. In the contemporary language of the internet, we have created the European Union 1.0 but the EU 2.0 challenge is to reach out to her Europeans.

I observe this not to digress but to conclude. In the model revealed to us by Professor Riccardi and his life's work the journey of individual engagement begins within and not outside each person. It can be inspired by a holistic vision of values in action but it is a bottom up and not a top down process. The revolution in attitude that is needed is a journey that must start not in Brussels or Strasbourg but at home in our capitals, in our communities, in our schools, in our curricula, in our media. The self indulgent political syndrome of 'blame it on Brussels', an all too widely practised black art in denial of national engagement in and shared responsibility for EU decision making has over the decades exercised a corrosive effect.

Together we Europeans have created a wonderful and historically unparalleled force for peace, prosperity and transformation at home and abroad. It is at once strong but also fragile, vulnerable to the indifference of those, its peoples, whom it serves. Europe needs her Europeans and when the dust settles after these parliamentary elections encouraging the active engagement of citizens from the bottom up should be among the most important of its tasks and priorities. The lesson of the Community of Sant' Egidio is that reaching in to the inner person and his or her sense of individual responsibility is the means to have them as individuals reach out to embrace the

wider world. It is a lesson worth applying to the concept of active citizenship in Europe without which in time the integration project celebrated each year here in Aachen could be at risk for the want of popular legitimacy.

Pat Cox