

## NEED FOR ITALY

Editorial, by Enrico Guglielminetti

(translated by Silvia Benso)

The current issue of *Spaziofilosofico* (May 2011) has Italy for its theme. It is our way of saying “Happy Birthday, Italy!” on her 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We have tried to offer a phenomenology of Italy; we have tried, as it were, to catch as if by surprise the essence (if there is one) of Italy in a scene, a fragment, a situation, an image, a landscape, a book, a concept... If one cannot speak of an essence, then one should perhaps better speak of perspectives on the phenomenon “Italy,” or of images of Italy, the Italians, and Italianness. We have been on a quest for the phenomenon, for the very idea, of Italy.

What is the genome “Italy,” if there is one? How did it evolve historically? Where is it headed? Or perhaps it has never evolved, and it has always been the same? What is revealed in the political current situation of the phenomenon Italy? And can one speak of “phenomenon,” if not of “essence,” for something that, like, a nation-state, is part of a continuous historical evolving?

It is our conviction that one must separate the need for a homeland, and the love for it, from its fatal, xenophobic, nationalistic, and imperialistic declensions. Not only is the love for one’s homeland not in contradiction with hospitality, but it could also either stand or fall together with the ability for solidarity and mutual aid. It is peculiar that fascism, which more than any other political movement has contributed to drag its homeland into shame, has ascribed, and continues to ascribe to itself the ambiguous virtue of patriotism. Perhaps the first step toward loving someone or something, be it even a homeland, is that of not violating it. Historically, violence against strangers has always revealed itself as the best viaticum for violence against citizens.

The duplicity of old and new Italians does not at all jeopardize Italianness, if there is such a thing. On the contrary, it confirms it. One of the peculiar features of Italianness, as it is identified by the essays in the current issue, is a specific manner—at times virtuous, at other times less so—of standing within duplicity. The very prevalence (which in some regards could be criticized) of the *ius sanguinis* over the *ius soli* (and *ius voluntatis*) in terms of citizenship has caused a situation such that individuals from Veneto or Calabria who have emigrated to Belgium, Germany, Spain, Argentina or the United States would continue for generations not only to feel like but also *to be* Italians despite the proclaimed double (or multiple) belonging of their language, work, and existence. The *ius sanguinis* has worked virtuously by releasing energies of belonging within difference that are quite far from the deadly energies of *blood and soil*. Like the Jews, Italians have often been in a condition of diaspora, which does not prevent them from having Italianness as a desire. Italianness is loved from afar, with a thought that moves towards constituting a small lacuna, a little empty space within which the diverse can find its place. For us, this diffraction is not accidental but rather essential.

Patriotism is not necessarily nationalism; likewise, the vindication of one's own identity is not at all necessarily exclusive. A key to understanding this might be offered by the grandiose Pauline image of the wild olive tree and the cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11:16-24). The enormous political virtuality of such an image is at the center of the informed conversations between Jacob Taubes and Carl Schmitt.<sup>1</sup>

Paul's issue is here to show, on the one hand, how God's promise to Israel has not failed (God's promises can never fail), and on the other how this does not exclude but in the end implies the im-possible widening of faithfulness to, as it were, the new Jews—that is, the Christians. At first, it simply seems as if God has cut off Israel's branches in order to graft the new Christian branches "in their stead." This logic of replacement is not Biblical, though. To get rid of the Jews in favor of the new people of the Christians would not be very wise: if the natural child (the Jew) has in fact not been able to withstand God's rage, how could the adoptive child do so? Paul threatens this much explicitly: "If God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you" (Rom. 11:21). The entire pericope tends toward addition, toward the felicitous im-possible, toward the grace of a drafting *onto* a draft. Not only is always the same root that supports the new branches but also, and more decisively, God has the power "to graft ... in again" the old branches, the Jews (Rom. 11:23); and He will certainly do so in the *eschaton*. According to this mystery, the resurrection of the dead *coincides* with the "re-admission" of the Jewish people (Rom. 11:15). When "the fullness of the Gentiles" has come in, then "all of Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25-26) and history (which is always partial, incapable of the whole) will end.

Paul's powerful, visionary image, which we cannot analyze as we should, is very instructive for us today too. There are no "true Finns"<sup>2</sup>; they are all the same, which does not mean at all that they are all in the same situation. There are natural and adoptive children. The Jews are to the Christians as the children of the first hour are to the newcomers. Christianity is in itself adoptive, not natural. We have been grafted in "contrary to nature" (Rom. 11:24), as the Apostle crudely says. The root will never be Christian but rather Jewish.

The crucial problem is space. Where should we put the newcomers? They do not fit! If the Biblical image were to stay within nature, we would have to resign ourselves to cutting off a branch so as to be able to graft another one in. The new grafted branches would be however foolish if they were "to become proud" (Rom. 11:18), since they too run the risk of being cut off, and with greater reason.

The "parable" sets out from nature in order then to effect an eschatological torsion that exceeds the realm of nature. Such a *twist* is given by the possibility of a new grafting in of the old branches *without that this amounts to* an elimination of the new ones.

In sum, Paul's olive tree is overcrowded; there are old and new Finns, and they are all true. Space gets to be added. Such *spacing* creates the space that it adds, as if the branches (each of the branches) do not occupy space as much as they *are* a space.

Politics, which has to cope with the physical limitations of nature, can flatten itself on it, or it can take up a freer and more far-looking vision. A nation is like an olive tree. The one who is born in it should certainly not be ashamed of it; rather, it should be proud. For such an individual too, as for the natural branches, there is the risk of being cut off if his or her behaviors shame the nation. The Italian is, in the first place, the one who represents Italy—the one who makes Italy look good no matter where he or she is born.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacob Taubes, *Die politische Theologie des Paulus* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/>.

The stranger is the one who drags Italy into shame and ridiculousness, regardless of where he or she is from.

Old and new branches can live *together*. We need politics of additions and not politics of exclusion. Such ability for additions might say something substantial regarding the Italian character in its best expression.

There is a need for Italy. Today, as in our past, in the *Risorgimento* [resurgence], Italianness gives itself in this internal diffraction, in this lack of presence (or presence in absence). No one needs Italy more than we Italians, who fervently desire new credible models in which to identify ourselves after we have pursued, for twenty years, false images of redemption that have made *no* promise whole (in truth, not even in part). Italy is needed by the migrants from Lampedusa, who arrive on our coasts wearing their best clothes, bringing their best commitment and their best hopes. Italy is needed also by the international institutions, which without our authoritative presence lack perhaps not a *thing* but rather a *tone*, a decisive *mode* of doing things.

The essays in the current issue, albeit in the even radical difference in perspectives, converge in the critical analysis of the present and in the indication of the need for a change. In distance from itself, when a flat coincidence with the present was not possible, our country always resorted to its best energies and drew amazing resources and abilities from some hidden depths. There is nothing that excites Italians more than the possibility of redemption. This is perhaps the best guarantee for our future.