

VareseNews

“Ideology counts for nothing, when there is human suffering”

Pubblicato: Martedì 2 Febbraio 2010

✘ In the foyer of the Teatro Sociale in Busto Arsizio, the presentation was given, yesterday, Saturday 30 January, of the book “Giorgio Perlasca, un Italiano scomodo”, published by Chiarelettere. The meeting with the journalists Carlotta Zavattiero and Daniel Hallenstein, who wrote the book, was chaired by Marisa Denna.

The story of Perlasca emerged on 30 April 1990, when an episode of Mixer, which spoke about him, was broadcast on the state television channel RAI Due.

Perlasca can be described as the Italian Schindler. In 1944, he was in Budapest on business; as he was being sought by the Nazis, he asked for, and obtained the Spanish nationality and passport. From that day on, he pretended to be the Spanish consul, and worked to save the lives of thousands of Jews, who were destined for the Nazi concentration camps. Here, below, are a number of questions the authors were asked, in order to highlight some key elements of the “Perlasca case”, and of the extremely long silence that, for decades, surrounded his actions.

How and when did you come to know about Perlasca?

(Hallenstein) “It was in 1991. I knew nothing about Perlasca. I spoke with the editor of the newspaper I was working for (The European), who sent me to him to do a report. Every Monday, there was a meeting to speak about possible articles. The people at the newspaper thought it strange that a fascist, pretending to be the Spanish Consul, had saved thousands of Jews.”

Why didn't you write the book about him immediately?

(Hallenstein) “At that time, the film “Schindler’s List” by Spielberg was coming out. In addition, my British publishers couldn’t understand why a man that had joined the Fascist Party should save so many Jews.”

Why did his story remain unknown for so many years?

(Zavattiero) “It wasn’t the fault of the press. The first article about him was published on 12 June 1961, one whole page written by Giuseppe Cerato, in the newspaper “Il Resto del Carlino”. At the end of the 1970s, Furio Colombo, who was the correspondent of “La Stampa”, wrote two pages about him. The cause of the silence was entirely political, it was because of the Cold War. Ideological opposition led to a person like Perlasca (who was not a practising Catholic) inevitably to be reduced to silence.”

When did Perlasca’s work begin?

(Zavattiero) “For Giorgio Perlasca, the work of saving Jews began the day after he obtained his Spanish passport.”

Why did neither the left, nor the right speak about him?

(Zavattiero) “The left was influenced by the fact that he had formerly been a fascist. The right could not agree to have as a symbol a man that had rejected the Italian Social Republic and the 1938 race laws, and had remained with the King.”

Why did even the Vatican not speak about him?

(Hallenstein) “As Perlasca’s son, Franco, has said, because there has always been an element of anti-Semitism in the church. They didn’t want to acknowledge him, because the church itself hadn’t done much to save the Jews.”

What led him to save the lives of thousands of Jews?

(Hallenstein) “In 1938, he rejected the race laws. He couldn’t understand them because many of his childhood friends had been Jewish, as were many soldiers at whose side he had fought in war. Then, when he had the opportunity to save people, he did it.”

What is Perlasca’s message today?

(Hallenstein) “That ideology counts for nothing, when there is human suffering.”

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