

NEV - a monthly press service from the news bulletin of the Federation of protestant churches in Italy

Via Firenze 38, 00184 Roma (Italy)

Tel. +06 48 25 120 - 06 48 37 68 - e-mail nev@fcei.it

number 228 - 30 September 2007

- * Third European Ecumenical Assembly of Sibiu: the Italian delegation
- * The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy has new offices
- * Sixth edition of "Torino Spiritualita"
- * Demonstrations of "Forza Nuova" against Waldensians

Third European Ecumenical Assembly of Sibiu: the Italian delegation

Rome, 30 September 2007 (NEV) - We received many comments concerning different aspects of the proceedings of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly held in Sibiu, Romania. Pastor Letizia Tomassone, Vice President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy told us that at least three important things came from this Assembly: 1) the experience of a long history of the city of Sibiu where many cultures and religions have lived together; 2) a vision of where we stand with respect to the visibility of the unity of the Church, bringing out many more facets of ecumenism than we might think; and 3) a vision for moving ahead linked to the collaboration already existing and to what should be developed on the themes of justice, environment, the trafficking of human beings, etc. At the same time she found that one of the great limits of the Assembly was in "not giving voice to the multiple and rich experiences of those present. More than an assembly, where everyone participates, it was a conference held on a stage".

Luca Negro, Communications Secretary for the European Council of Churches, noted the extreme diversity of the ecumenical people. He told us: "An article in an Italian magazine spoke of the Assembly as being the anti-Ratzinger part of Christianity. This does put into evidence the fact that ecclesiastical hierarchies are not that important for ecumenism. Sibiu confirmed the fact that ecumenism has not stopped and does not fear confrontation. The people at the Assembly had a deep desire to discuss, express their ideas and listen to those of the others. Sibiu mirrored the reality of Christianity in Europe. There were those worried about safeguarding Christianity against rising secularization and there were those we could define more by their spirituality. And the great news is that the extremes no longer are afraid to meet together – Protestant liberals with the very orthodox or radicals with conservatives. At Sibiu we understood that we have visions that are very diverse. The churches are called to give a contribution in Europe that is plural and what came out of the Assembly was a testimony to the diversity of the voices".

The Italian ecumenical delegation to Sibiu, made up of Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics was the most numerous with its 121 components. It was also the only one to go united to the Assembly. It had already made an appointment to meet in November to work together on the possible implications of the Assembly in Italy. During the Assembly the Italian delegation had the possibility to meet and present a series of motions which were accepted in the final document of the Assembly. The delegates of the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Italian churches that are members of the Conference of European Churches - among whom Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and Waldensians - among other things made proposals on the themes of the safeguard of creation, peace and justice. In particular it was requested to make a careful study on peace, not only as a moment of reconciliation, but also as an opposition to the arms race. This proposal was supported strongly by

Pastor Letizia Tomassone who proposed the introduction into the Constitution of the European Union an article which refutes war, following the example of the Italian Constitution. Support for the United Nations Millennium Development goals as a way of easing poverty was advanced by Pastor Anna Maffei, President of the Union of Italian Christian Baptist Churches. Other battle cries of the Italian delegation were also on the themes of immigration and inter religious dialogue with other faiths stemming from the roots of Abraham.

The final document of the Assembly created a lot of discussion because of a few critical issues, especially on the mention of respect for life "from conception to death", a phrase that was taken from the final draft, which can be obtained from the web site www.eea.org.

New location for the deanery of the Lutheran Church in Italy

Rome, 30 September 2007 (NEV) - It was an afternoon of celebration for the inauguration of the new location of the Deanery of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy. The Central Offices were moved from Via Toscana to Via Aurelia Antica 391 in a building that is also the office of the Germanic Historical Institute and the Center for Ecumenical Studies "Filippo Melantone". "Being in the same building with the Historical Institute and the Melantone Center will permit us to have at our doorstep partners readily available for research and formative activities, contributing to our linking the Italian culture with the German culture", Pastor Holgar Milkau, Dean of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy, told us. "We hope that this place will give identity and stimulus and make our church even more effective and convincing in its life of witness. The Lutheran Church in Italy feels very strongly that it has the job of making its presence felt through the transmission of its theology, ethic and history". For the occasion two displays were set up: "Sacred Art" by D.M. Weidenbach and "Luther in Rome" by Prof. Jurgen Kruger. The Luther display is the first event tied to the Decade of memories and proposals for the upcoming 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017. "Our aim - explained Milkau - is to dedicate this Decade to awareness of the meaning of the Reformation in Italy and in Europe with a series of conferences, displays, publications, concerts and cultural trips".

An ecumenical ceremony gathered the many pastors and leaders of the Lutheran churches coming from all over Italy and abroad in the chapel of the Deanery. Representatives of other churches and organizations, in particular Bishop Johannes Friedrich, President of the Lutheran Churches in Germany, Pastor Maria Bonafede, Moderator of the Waldensian Church, Pastor Anna Maffei, President of the Union of Christian Baptist Churches in Italy, Pastor Domenico Maselli, President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, Professor Daniele Garrone, Dean of the Waldensian Faculty of Theology in Rome, Fiedmann Steck, Director of the Melantone Ecumenical Center, Cardinal Karl Lehmann, President of the German Episcopal Conference and Mons. Sergio Goretti, representing the Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue of the Italian Episcopal Conference were also present.

A round table discussion was held on "Faith and History". The social and political commitment, war and the responsibility of religions, and ecumenism were some of the themes discussed. The discussion was moderated by Bernhard Wabnitz, Rome correspondent for the German television network ARD. The Hon. Paolo Ferrero, Minister for Social Solidarity of the Italian Government, Maria Antonietta Visceglia, President of the Italian Society of Modern History, German ambassador Michael Steiner, Bishop Johannes Friedrich and Cardinal Karl Lehmann participated in the round table. Ferrero, a Waldensian, talked of the personal commitment of the Christian in the process of social transformation. "The temptation to which I, as a politician, can feel myself exposed to is to think that the Gospel is enacted in my political choices and therefore confuses my actions with God's way of doing. God, throughout history, challenges us instead, through the image of Christ crucified and risen, to question everything we do. Christianity cannot identify itself with this or that civilization or culture, but it remains a prophetic and universal message". Ambassador Steiner spoke on war, telling of his experience as diplomat working for peace in ex-Yugoslavia. "In Bosnia and Kosovo the conflict was fed more by fear than by hate. Nationalism made leverage on this fear transforming a neighbor into a stranger and an enemy. The role of the religions in this dramatic situation should have been to restore

the humanity of the enemy but - concluded Steiner - no pulpit was able to express itself in this way". A reference to ecumenism was not lacking in the discussion. Referring to the recent Vatican document on the nature of the church, the moderator Wabnitz asked the Lutheran Bishop Friedrich and Cardinal Lehmann to comment. Friedrich stressed how in the last 40 years ecumenism has reached unthinkable results, solving many critical issues. The knots that still have to be untied are really the most difficult to solve and it is important that all the sides state their positions clearly. Cardinal Lehmann recalled how Catholics and Protestants in Germany have a collaboration covering many aspects of the life of faith and witness". This is a heritage, notwithstanding the difficulties, that we cannot throw away, but must hold it in great honor as the work of the Holy Spirit". Lehmann concluded offering the figure of Moses as an example: he worked all his life looking toward the Promised Land without ever getting there. "We must also commit ourselves to ecumenical dialogue even if in our lifetime we will not see its more significant fruits". Maria Antonietta Viscegli gave an historical excursus, starting from the writings of Eusebius in the IV century, on the main taps in history when faith has made its mark.

Sixth edition of "Torino Spiritualità"

Rome, 30 September 2007 (NEV) - After a weekend of "spiritual walks" thought out in a non-confessional way, travelling through sacred sites of Piedmont, the manifestation "Torino Spiritualità" was organized for the sixth time. The aim of the program is to gain knowledge of the themes and thoughts that spirituality makes in the various cultures and religions that are present in Turin and Italy. This year's theme was on "Body and Spirit" with about one hundred philosophers, theologians, historians, writers, reporters, scientists, economist and politicians participating. Some of the themes discussed where: God in bodies, the political body, the rules of the body, body language, pain and pleasure, the body between wisdom and experience. Mortified or exalted, venerated or demonized, but never ignored, the body is a fundamental part of every religious doctrine and in its relationship to the spirit and the divinity it is possible to see the essential lines that characterize and distinguish the various religions and denominations. Travelling through the historical and philosophical aspects of the body, with its social implications, sexuality, art and mythology, the Waldensian theologian Prof. Paolo Ricca offered a lesson on the concept of the body in the Protestant tradition. Maria Bonafede, Moderator of the Waldensian Church, together with the journalist Gabriella Caramore, ran through the history of relationships of women with religious power, which has always been the prerogative of men. Pastor Letizia Tomassone, Vice President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, talked on the "Women's Bible" going through the complex dimension of femininity in religion and in the sacred texts of the Christian tradition. Waldensian Pastor Giuseppe Platone, as the spokesperson of the Interfaith Committee of the City of Torino, together with the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Italian Government, Mr. Giuliano Amato, talked on the "Charter of values of citizenship and integration". This gives a rundown of what the Protestant contribution was to this program. Iranian Shirin Ebadi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, talked on "Islam: dilemma of democracy". Is it possible to be Muslim and democratic at the same time? Can you believe in one God and his prophet Mohamed, respecting at the same time the rights of individuals, including those of women and of minorities? "To deny the compatibility between Islam and democracy is false and dangerous - said Ebadi. Declaring that Islam and human rights are not compatible, plays into the hands of integralists. We must rebel and find a just compromise: this is the dilemma that Islam find itself in today".

Demonstration of "Forza Nuova" against Waldensians

Rome, 30 September 2007 (NEV) - The Waldensian Executive Board (Tavola valdese) of the Waldensian Church (Union of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches in Italy) expressed its deep concern about a demonstration organized by "Forza Nuova", an extreme rightist movement, held in the square in front of the Catholic Church in Torre Pellice, near Turin. Torre Pellice is the historic site

of the Waldensian Protestant presence in Italy, situated near Pinerolo in Piedmont. The aim of the demonstration was to “relaunch the anti-abortionist fight” against the Waldensian community, guilty of “supporting strenuously the law 194” (the Italian abortion law).

“After the swastikas and writings ‘Waldensians to the stake’ on the walls of the Waldensian churches of San Germano Chisone (Turin) and of Turin itself, now we have to see a leaflet campaign against the Waldensians in their historic home, the work of a squad of Forza Nuova”, declared Pastor Maria Bonafede, Moderator of the Tavola valdese, who immediately denied the “defamatory accusations contained in the leaflet spread by Forza Nuova with its contemptuous and denigrator tones”. The Tavola valdese asked the competent authorities to use the maximum discernment and vigilance to safeguard the life and liberty of the Waldensian Church and of religious minorities in Italy.

Claudio Pasquet, pastor of the Waldensian Church in Torre Pellice, commenting on the event, said that “the act was almost insignificant in itself, but in allowing this demonstration, shouldn't the authorities have taken into consideration what had happened previously at the churches in San Germano Chisone and Turin? Hadn't anyone thought that this was evidently an attempt to provoke a clash between religions at a time we really have no need of it? If this is true, it failed, also because the parish priest of Torre Pellice, whom I thank, had joined us and those who wanted to keep everyone calm. But I also would tell the Vatican hierarchies who have recently reaffirmed that we are not even ‘church’ and are gravely lacking in what it takes to be one, that they should be careful about what they say because as we can see, there is always someone ready to gather your judgements and brand us as having ‘positions that are substantially anti-Christian”.

nev - monthly press service of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy - via Firenze 38 - 00184 Roma - telephone 0039 064825120 or 06483768, fax 064828728 - editor: Tom Noffke - abbonamento/subscription: 10,30 Euro - international post order to NEV, via Firenze 38,00184 Roma, Italy - e-mail: nev@fpei.it - web site: <http://www.fpei.it> - autorizzazione Tribunale di Roma n. 518/86 del 4/9/1986 - direttore responsabile Valerio Papini - mensile - finito di stampare il 30/9/2007 - pubblicato in inglese
