

The General Assembly and the dialogues of the Focolare

The General Assembly of the Focolare, ten days before its conclusion, had an unprecedented moment with an encounter with a large group of representatives of evangelical Christian and Catholic movements, people of various religious faiths and people of non-religious convictions. The twofold objective: to strengthen ties after years of common history and to greet in person the re-elected president Maria Voce and the co-president Jesús Morán. A very full afternoon that brought into focus a horizon of dialogue on all fronts, to which the Focolare Movement, by its very nature, feels called with renewed commitment.

The group represented a wide network of people and organizations, "a real support for the construction of universal brotherhood," as the President put it.

The journey of "Together for Europe", a project that has been on-going for the past 15 years and now shared by 300 Christian movements, was presented by Thomas Römer of the YMCA of Munich, Gerhard Pross, responsible for a network of over a hundred evangelical movements, Gérard Testard, from France, co-founder of Fondacio and now chairman of Ephesia, Fr Heinrich Walter, President of Schoenstatt, and Cesare Zucconi, who also brought greetings from Andrea Riccardi of the Sant'Egidio Community. What emerged was the vitality of a fabric of relationships where it is possible to "articulate the spiritual and the 'political'", a dialogue of life and commitment that overcomes prejudices and encourages people to work together for peace.

"Bringing the warmth of peace to the world together", this was the heart of the message of the leaders of the Buddhist Rissho Kosei-kai Movement from Japan, represented by the Rev. Katsuotishi Mizumo with his wife and Hiromasa Tanaka. And "taking ahead dialogue together" was the vision that emerged from the testimony of the Muslim voices of Prof. Adnane Mokrani, the Director of the "Tiber" Cultural Centre in Rome, Mustafa Cenap of Turkey, and Prof. Shahrzad Houshmand, an Iranian theologian, who confided that he had learned from Chiara Lubich "the force of universal faith that reaches the hearts of all believers."

A distinguishing feature of this dialogue is life, according to the American Emily Soloff, of the Jewish faith, because "in the Focolare, dialogue with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, is always a dialogue of life," that starts "from each one's experience and effort to understand the other." Lisa Palmieri-Billig, who is also from the American Jewish Committee, pointed out that in the Focolare she had understood that "we must be the first to go to the other," as "a remedy to the spread of hatred."

"Chiara Lubich understood right from the outset that unity is built with others, not against others," Luciana Scalacci affirmed with determination. "She could not leave out all the people in the world who - like me - do not identify with any religious faith." Others who spoke were Zdravka Gutic, former deputy mayor of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Juri Pismak, a scientist from St. Petersburg, Russia, and a young man from Rome, Andrea Onelli.

Contributions that Maria Voce considered as "precious pearls that enrich the heritage of which we are all custodians", and that should be "kept together and shared for the benefit of mankind." Jesús Morán, thanking everyone, said "at an Assembly such as this - looking to the future, whilst remaining firmly anchored to the source, it was essential to have a moment together like this. Together with you, we are more ourselves."

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