



EUROPEAN VOCATIONS CONGRESS
Oporto, 3rd to the 6th July 2008
Press Release

From the 3rd to the 6th July the city of Porto, Portugal played host to the European Vocations Congress which took as its theme "Samaritans of hope for a human and Christian Europe of the future". The 98 Delegates came from 21 nations, among them Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Slovenia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Sweden, Austria, England and Wales, Switzerland, Belgium, Albania, Bosnia, and Malta. Those present included Bishop Wojciech Polack from Poland, president of the EVS, Fr. Ferenc Janka, delegate of the CCEE, Paul Bednarczyk, representative of the U.S. National Religious Vocations Conference, Mons. Jean-Louis Brugues, Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Mons. Francis Bonnici (POVS), Fr. Eusebio Hernandez O.A.R, of the CIVC, Matilde de Jesus Faneca, of the UCESMA and Mons. Antonio Fransisco dos Santos, Bishop of Aveiro and President of the Portuguese Episcopal Commission for Vocations and Ministries. Portugal's hospitality towards delegates gathered from the various other European nations created a good humoured and joyful atmosphere.

The chosen theme was looked at from a variety of diverse perspectives over the course of the days of the congress. Frs. Raffaele Sacco and Eusebio Hernandez considered the Vatican II documents that spoke of a new way of pastoral care of vocations, and mentioned the tentative first steps towards this new approach in the preceding years. They examined the different stages along this path and the significance of the Itaici International Congress of 1994 and the 1997 meeting in Rome, of which "In Verbo Tuo" was the fruit, a document of importance which is opened a path that must be continued. Mons. Brugues reminded us of the meaning today of the words "Samaritan" and "Hope", underlining the fact that they are blind spots in secular society, and terms that invite us to recover our taste for life and eternity, both of which are at the origin of the call to religious life, priesthood and the other Christian vocations. He added that a precise plan for vocations did not exist, other than the witness of priests who are happy in their ministry.

The following two presentations, "The Transformations of European Culture" by George Weigel and "A Portuguese Perspective on European Culture", by His Eminence Cardinal Jose Policarpo, Patriarch of Lisbon, aimed to describe the reality of contemporary Europe. The former spoke of the drama of atheistic humanism, which places God as the enemy of human freedom, and causes spiritual apathy, a loss of the category of the moral, and makes dialogue impossible with its lack of truth as a reference point. Cardinal Policarpo stated the need for a Christian culture that would give Europe its identity, as without this, the continent would fall into secularism and immanentism. Traditional Portuguese Culture has been increasingly influenced by such negative values.

Finally, Fr. Mario Oscar Llanos centered his presentation on "New Vocations for a New Europe". Its first part "Perspectives on the concept of vocation of 'In Verbo Tuo' reminded us that this was primarily a document of a pastoral, methodological and pedagogic nature, rather than a dogmatic or doctrinal one. Some aspects needed updating: Europe has changed since 1997; Christian Initiation needed to be renewed; and more attention given to specific vocations, as well as to the profile of those who seek vocational guidance. In the second part, "The Pedagogy of vocations and the spirit of vocations", Fr. Llanos spoke of the following pedagogic strategies: sowing the seed at the right time; promoting the specific vocation and the unique contribution of women in the pedagogy of vocations.

The delegates from the different countries spoke of the changes that had taken place at home since 1997, and the diversity of situations and approaches. The Congress also heard about examples of structures at all levels-national (Poland), diocesan (Besançon in France), intermediate (Innsbruck, Salzburg and Vienna) and parish (Porto).

As the culmination of the congress a trip to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima took place. Mary is the model of all Christian vocation and She gives all who work in pastoral care of vocations hope and inspiration that others can be 'caught' by our bothers and sisters.

All present were grateful for the warm welcome, cordiality and hospitality of our Portuguese hosts. Each day private and community prayer, culminating in the Eucharist, created a note of harmony and fraternity among the delegates, leaving them with a joy and renewed hope to take home.

The next congress was scheduled for Rome, Deo voluntas, from the 2nd to 5th July 2009.

Porto, Portugal, 6th July 2008