

4th European Assembly

From the 18th to the 22nd of August, 42 Missionaries of the Sacred Heart from the Provinces of Europe met in Issoudun for the Fourth European Assembly. The European Provincials had proposed to study the theme of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

The group was joined by Sr. Esther Baselmans, a Daughter of our Lady of the Sacred Heart from Netherlands who is a member of the joint Dutch MSC/FDNSC JPIC Commission and by Mathieu Lobingo, a lay man from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who works with the Missionary Centre of the MSCs in Salzburg. Fr. André Claessens, the Belgian Provincial was the moderator of this Assembly and had invited a French couple, Joel and Jeanine Lebillan, to speak to the group on the issue of immigration. The couple are members of CIMADE (a French network which works with and lobbies on behalf of migrants refugees) and are also from the reformed Christian tradition, which brought an extra ecumenical dimension to the Assembly.

Fr. Claessens refreshed our memory by recalling the different important texts of the Church and our own MSC Congregation on the question of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This question has become more important in our Church over many years, especially since the Second Vatican Council.

Fr. Alfred Bour explored, in the context of our MSC tradition, the notion of ‘reparation’. As suggested in the documents of the General Chapter of 2005: could not justice, peace and the integrity of creation be the new name for reparation? Fr. Bour deepened an idea close to his own heart; to think of reparation as “restoring the image of God a wounded humanity”.¹

Mr and Mrs Lebillan discussed the issues and challenges of immigration in Europe in general and in our communities in particular. This couple work in a number of different organisations that deal with this issue. There was an invitation for us to work in partnership with these organisations and with other Congregations.

Fr. Claessens took the time to introduce us to an emerging development, that of ‘eco-spirituality’. On the occasion of the World Day of Peace both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have both referred to it. The safeguarding of creation was also a theme spoken of by the Pope at World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia in July of this year. There is then the need to take into account the theology of creation, incarnation and redemption. We recall that Fr. Chevalier himself had a cosmic vision of the spirituality of the heart.²

After each input there were discussion groups arranged according to geographical areas³ which allowed for further reflection and appropriation of the material. At the end of each day we came together in a plenary session to share the fruits of our discussions and questions.

As we have done previously at each Assembly, we dedicated one session to receiving an update from the members of the European “Cordate” community of Aston. This is a European MSC project that was born of the first European Assembly in Issoudun in 2002. It is made up

¹ The complete document written by Fr. Bour can be accessed online on www.misacor.org in three languages – Spanish, French and English.

² For further information see the book by Fr. Mayor, Fifteen Days of Prayer with Fr. Chevalier. It is already translated into Spanish.

³ 1. Ireland, England, Belgium & Netherland. 2. France, Switzerland, Italy & Spain. 3. North Germany, South Germany & Austria.

of three brothers (Ton, Carl and Mark).⁴ Our confreres have already spent almost one year in Aston⁵ in a multicultural environment characterised by diverse religious outlooks. They offer a communal presence as MSC which embodies our own spirituality. In the heart of this city they live a community life based on reflection and prayer with a ministry of presence. They told us that little by little they are gaining the confidence and trust of the people who live in this neighbourhood, which has many of the problems of our modern society: drugs, violence, loneliness, etc. This community project is truly the product of a communal discernment and is sustained by all eight MSC Provinces of Europe. Their style of mission can be an inspiration even for our more classical communities. We are proud of this simple yet deep project, especially since it shows how our spirituality of the heart can help bring about the “new world” imagined by Fr. Chevalier. This project had a positive impact on our 4th European assembly. It is an encouragement for all of us.

In the evening Fr. Joseph Hegglin and Fr. Pavol Baroš gave a report on our MSC mission in Russia. The Catholic Church is a minority. It is an important presence in a world that is a somewhat closed, but which has a great spiritual thirst. Pavol (from Slovakia) and Tomek Poterala (from Poland) are two young priests who have been formed in Nitra.

The participants of the Fourth European Assembly wish to bring to the attention of our MSC confreres the following points:

1. We should have this desire to inform ourselves on the theme of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Many texts relating to these issues exist in both the Church and our Congregation. This information is a part of the realisation of our charism.
2. We are the first beneficiaries of the blessings which flow from the pierced Heart of Jesus and in turn we must show this goodness to all human beings and creation. The cosmic vision that Fr. Jules Chevalier had immerses us deeply in this eco-spirituality. It challenges us to lead a simple lifestyle that respects both creation and people.
3. Immigration is now an increasing reality in our cities. We need to examine what this means for both our society and our Church. Immigration confronts us with new challenges of solidarity for which we must have an open heart.

⁴ Ton from the Netherlands, Carl from England and Mark from Belgium. See www.cordate.org

⁵ Aston is a neighbourhood of the city of Birmingham.