

**Introductory Greeting at the International Seminar at Warsaw (9-12 February 2009)
by Antonia Grasselli**

I would first like to send a warm greeting to everyone. I am the coordinator of the European project “The Righteous and the resistance to totalitarianism.” I would like to thank those present for having accepted our invitation to come to Warsaw for this international seminar. In particular I would like to thank the Director of the History Meeting House Piotr Jakubowski who hosted us and Dr. Anna Ziarkowska who organized the seminar with myself.

And the “E. Fermi” *Liceo* in Bologna which I represent is the leader of the network “History and Memory” and is the promotional institution of the European project “The Righteous and the resistance to totalitarianism.”

Our aim is to promote trial education paths in schools. A network with Italian and European institutions was created with this objective to put different abilities and skills to use.

This year’s European project is the continuation of the previous project that had the theme of “The Righteous and the memory of the good.” The change in title indicates an enlargement of the horizons of our research and our investigation. This extension is owed not only to motivations of a cultural nature, but also to meetings with various people and several very committed Polish and Romanian institutions in this sector of study who are interested in the education of youth.

The seminar that begins today is the main initiative of the new European project. This is why.

It was prepared at meetings in Italy (Milan and Bologna), Warsaw, Krakow and Bucharest. I had the opportunity to meet the people that are here today on these occasions. This is how it was possible to circumscribe such a large theme and define the issues that are the focal points in the various sessions.

The seminar has been structured into workgroups, to give adequate space to participant dialogue and confrontation and thus allow a positive interaction between various skills and abilities. Various because they accrued in different professional realms (university – school – cultural institutes). Also various because they mirror an education that took place in national contexts which are different in many aspects.

This year’s European project puts the phenomenon of totalitarianism at the center of attention.

Totalitarian systems and the Second World War were dramatic experiences whose memory is still alive in the memories of our families. They are historical experiences which we must continuously returning to in life.

But our common experience also suggests to us that the disparity between fascism and communism, understood as belonging to two realities that are geographically distinct, is too schematic and this difference cannot make sense of the complexity of what happened. There are questions, events, circumstances that instead show that the fields of influence are much less simple to define than that which may, at first glance, seem superficial.

We should consider the elaboration of the collective memory. I believe that this is how we will be transmitted a more realistic view of the past to our young people.

I would like to give an example. A few years ago, a colleague of mine who teaches mathematics found himself in the position of external commissioner of a state exam at a Bologna *Liceo*. During the history test a student did not know the answer to the question of who Stalin was. That student was very ignorant, but everyone knows who Hitler was even without having studied him in school books. The name of Hitler arouses horror, along with the symbols of his power. We can ask: why don’t the name of Stalin and the symbols of his power arise an equal disgust?

The anti-Semitism of the Jewish Holocaust is a part of our common European history. I realized that these themes do not represent just one aspect of this, but they also make up a point of view that is very interesting in examining our past and the memory that we have constructed of it.

A piece of information that Italian participants have in common is the interest in the forms of resistance that the individual is capable of, because the possibility that man will always have of exercising a personal responsibility is mostly highlighted in these forms. According to different ways and characteristics, it is possible to identify examples of this kind in any context. They are examples of what we call the *Righteous*. We believe that a comparison between the different totalitarianisms is useful even from this point of view. A historical perspective that considers these aspects as well is in fact more wide reaching and more complete. But with a warning: the re-evaluation of behaviors that were important in the defense of human dignity should be done within defined historical frameworks with great precision, especially in reference to phenomena of alignment and collaborationism.

Otherwise, it is possible to fall into the risk of making a new reading that is partial and instrumental of history.

Finally, the memory of the good has a large educational value. In this case as well, to avoid its reduction to a new moralizing rhetoric, it is necessary to really understand the concrete keys and the actions to be implemented to construct it.

I hope that the work will produce good results, that it is valuable for everyone in the end and that Thursday morning mutual conclusions will be drawn.