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Italy enters into concordates with Mormons, Apostolic Pentecostals, and an Orthodox Church

By Massimo Introvigne

CESNUR (21.07.2012) - The Italian Senate approved on July 18, 2012 "intese" with the Mormon Church, the Italian Apostolic Church - a Pentecostal body tracing its origins in the Welsh revival - and the Orthodox Church loyal to the Ecumenical Patriarchate- The "intese" should now be signed by the President of the Republic and published in Italy's Official Gazette before coming into force, but these are routine steps to be completed in few months. A long process leading to these "intese" is, accordingly, basically concluded.

Italy has a system of concordates called "Intese" regulating the State's relations with a number of religious bodies. Concordates provide inter alia for spiritual assistance in the military forces, hospitals, public schools and jails, and legal recognition of marriages performed by a priest or minister. An important feature is the possible entrance of the religious bodies with an "intesa" which so elects (they can, in fact, refuse this benefit) with a concordate into the 0,8% system. This is a peculiar Italian system where each taxpayer should devote 0,8% of his or her taxes either to a religious body or to the national public charity system by crossing the preferred institution's case on the tax form. Unlike in Germany, if the taxpayer fails to cross a case he or she does not keep the money, that is divided between the different bodies according to their national percentage scores (unless they explicitly declare that they want to keep only the 0,8% of those crossing their name, and some religious bodies do just this). For example, if one does not cross any case and the Catholic Church case is crossed by 90% of those who crossed a case, and the Baptist Church by 2%, 90% of 0,8% of taxes paid by the non-crosser will go to the Catholic Church, 2% of 0,8% to the Baptist Church, and so on. Most Churches advertise through TV and other campaigns to capture the unchurched's 0,8%. Only a minority selects the State charities often plagued by scandals.

Churches with "intese" include, so far, Waldensians and Methodists (1984), Seventh-day Adventists (1986), Assemblies of God (1986), the Jewish Communities (1987), Baptists (1993) and Lutherans (1993). The Catholic Church has a "concordate", something more than the "intese", with a Constitutional status protecting it from interferences by the Italian judiciary, and gets a large majority of the 0,8% tax money.

The Italian Buddhist Union, the Italian Hindu Union, and Jehovah's Witnesses are next in line for a final approval of their "intese".

Observatory on religious liberty commences in Rome

Archbishop William Lori Brings Freedom of Religion Discussion to International Forum

By Ann Schneible

Zenit.org (28.06.2012) - Archbishop William E. Lori today addressed the introductory meeting of the newly-established Religious Liberty Observatory in Rome. The Observatory is an initiative of Italy's foreign affairs office which aims to support Italian international diplomacy with regards to violations against religious liberty.

Archbishop Lori, who is Chairman of the United States Bishops' Ad Hoc committee for religious liberty, was invited to speak to the Observatory because of his role in promoting and defending religious liberty. Religious freedom in the United States is currently being threatened by the US government's Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate; under this mandate, institutions would be required by law to provide contraceptive pharmaceuticals and medical procedures for employees, regardless of religious belief.

In his speech entitled "Religious Liberty: God's Gift to all Nations is our Responsibility to Defend," Archbishop Lori spoke about the importance of ensuring that religious freedom is rightly understood and protected. Individuals and groups, the archbishop maintains, have the right "not only to worship freely, but indeed to put their faith into practice, both publicly and privately."

Currently taking place in the United States is the Fortnight of Freedom, initiative introduced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in the two weeks leading up to Independence Day on July 4th. Its purpose, says Archbishop Lori, "is to pray that our freedom to proclaim and practice our faith will be preserved, and to spark among ourselves, and our fellow citizens that internal vigilance, which is the price of freedom."

"Violations against religious liberty should alarm us all," the archbishop continued, "whether one is religiously inclined or not. Something fundamental is being lost in American culture and law. If this loss of freedom does not and will not serve the common good of our nation, or of other nations where bloody religious persecutions are underway, at the end of the day we will be judged by our fidelity to our responsibilities and how we sustain that fidelity."

"Our responsibilities call us to rally for religious freedom in the context of the national common good, and as a beacon of hope for people suffering religious persecution in many parts of the world," he said.

Chairman of the Religious Liberty Observatory Massimo Introvigne, who moderated the conference, explained the decision to invite an American archbishop to introduce the initiative, rather than a representative of a country where religious persecution is manifested more with greater force. "Archbishop Lori," he explained, "has been active in a very important field, a field which should be our starting point: What is religious liberty? And why is religious liberty important?" Religious freedom, Introvigne said, "is the very cornerstone of our freedoms and liberties."

It is important, moreover, to show that violations against religious liberty are happening throughout the world. "It is an alarming trend in recent years" Introvigne continued, to witness "serious problems of religious liberty in the West, in Europe, in North America. And I think we should all be aware that religious liberty is not only a problem in Africa or in Asia. It's a problem everywhere, and there are some disturbing developments also in the West."

Italian man arrested as Italy cracks down on Islamic extremist network supporting terrorism

Associated Press (23.04.2012) - Police arrested an Italian man Monday in a crackdown in several Italian cities on an Islamic extremist network suspected of supporting international terrorism.

Alfonso Polverino, an anti-terrorism police official in Cagliari, Sardinia, said the man was arrested in Pesaro, an Adriatic sea town. Polverino told Sky TG24 TV that the man was suspected of training Islamic extremists.

Authorities at a news conference in Cagliari identified the man as Andrea Campione, a 28-year-old worker at a frame factory in Pesaro who had converted to Islam. Campione is said to have a Moroccan girlfriend and was reportedly about to travel to Morocco. Monday's operations grew out of the arrest in March in Brescia of a Moroccan suspected of plotting an attack against a Milan synagogue.

Police said they were searching for several suspects, including a Cagliari high school teacher who allegedly translated al-Qaida-inspired texts on the Internet. Training materials for extremists also included translation of manuals explaining how to build a bomb at home, officials at the news conference said.
