

Domenico Maselli, An Unconventional Man

Domenico Maselli, born in Alessandria (northern Italy) in 1933, died in Lucca in March 2016. I had the honor of knowing this man when he was pastor at the Methodist-Valdesian Church in Lucca. At the time I didn't know that he was also a former politician.

Passing the church in Via Galli Tassi, I was curious to know why it appeared different from other churches in Lucca, the “town of 100 churches”. The façade is simple, and the interior even more so. On one wall are the Ten Commandments, on the other the Golden Rule. No paintings, no crucifix, no altar. This was clearly not a Catholic Church. Having been raised Methodist, I found the church's simplicity and the congregation's cordiality warmly familiar.

Pastor Maselli was quite approachable, and when a British couple wrote to me to say they wanted to renew their marriage vows, he was willing to perform this “unconventional” (as he referred to it) ceremony. For the occasion, he sat with the British couple and had a conversation with them about what it really meant to be married.

Last month, the Fondazione Banca del Monte di Lucca held a conference at its *Palazzo delle Esposizioni* (Piazza San Martino, 7), especially aimed at teachers. The topic was Maselli's political involvement and “non-conventional” ways of behaving. Maselli's documents and various writings about him will become part of *Memorie di Lucca*, an archive created by the Foundation and the Istituto Storico Lucchese to recall notable Lucca citizens, such as Don Arturo Paoli, who served as a missionary in South America for much of his life (see the articles in *Grapevine* published in February 2013 and November 2017). Knowing history is a very good way to prepare for the future.

Maselli was committed to social engagement, to serving humanity. At the University of Florence he taught the history of Christianity. He was a member of the *Accademia di San Carlo* Borromeo, named for Cardinal Federico Borromeo (1564-1631), who founded the Ambrosian Library in Milan. From 1994 to 2001

he served in Parliament, representing the Christian Democrats and PD. From 2006 to 2009, he was President of the Federation of Italian Evangelical Churches.

The Valdesians, or Waldensians as they are known outside of Italy, are a Protestant sect that was founded in Lyon in 1173 and was persecuted well into the 1800s. Then during World War II, the Waldensians saved many Jews from persecution. Novelist Italo Calvino and politician Valdo Spini are Waldensians. The sect opposes the use of religious symbols such as the crucifix, favors debate regarding homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and stem cell research, and takes a progressive stance on many other social issues. In some Italian towns these churches keep registries for biological wills (where people express their desired treatment prior to dying). They promote religious diversity and freedom of conscience.

In Lucca, Maselli seemed to be a simple pastor, but the values he represented went well beyond himself and his congregation, connecting this little town to the entire world.

– by Norma Jean Bishop

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from the left: Gianluca Polverari, Alessio Lucarotti, Adriano Fabris, don Mauro Lucchesi, Paul Krieg (speakers at the conference of 27 October)

