

Italy Coming of Age in 2016

Judith Harris (January 04, 2016)



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ROME -- Traditionalism is among the delights of Italy, where family and social customs that date back centuries continue to be honored. But even the most traditional society changes over time, and in 2016 we are seeing an Italy that is coming of age in many respects, from civil unions to migrants and mascara.

An indication came from Italian President Sergio Mattarella's touching mention, in his annual speech welcoming in the New Year, of the outstanding woman athlete Nicole Orlando, 22. Racing in the IAADS world cup competition held in South Africa in November, Orlando had set a new world record in the triathlon (long jump, 100-meter race, weight toss). IAADS is the International Athletic

Association for Persons with Down Syndrome, from which she suffers. In a New Year's Day interview back home in Biemonte, near Biella, Nicole said that she had been watching TV when she suddenly heard the President describe her as one of three "emblematic figures" for Italy.

In South Africa she had been photographed with a tear-strained face on the victor's podium because, she explained, her beloved grandmother had been expected to accompany her to South Africa, but had died shortly before they were to leave. "Still, I'm one happy girl. I get to do the things I like best -- not every 22-year-old gets to travel and to win. My parents, both athletes, had me in a swimming pool when I was one, and a love of sports took me by the hand." Now she must continue her intensive training, including for table tennis, but also find the time to respond to all the messages of congratulations she has received. (See the relay race the Italians won at Bloemfontein, South Africa, at: [>> \[2\]](#))

On another level, Premier Matteo Renzi, head of the government for 22 months to date, has promised that he will soon begin to press for approval of a pending bill, much urged by Italy's European Union partners, which would allow civil unions. Proposed back in 2012 and known as the Leopolda Bill, this is slated to come before the Senate within the next month or two. "I recognize that there are many for and against it in my own Partito Democratico as well as in Forza Italia -- it is a divisive issue." Still, we have to deal with it, he continued, "and I will do all I can so that the forthcoming Senate debate will be as serious and honest as possible."

Perhaps hindering its passage is the article in the Leopolda Bill that would allow so-called "stepchild adoption," which would allow gay partners to adopt children. Supporters of the bill fear Renzi may strip off this section so as to ease support for the rest. However, there is already some support for stepchild adoption. Melita Cavallo, 70, is now retiring as President of the Minors Tribunal of Rome. In six separate cases, Judge Cavallo has already allowed child adoption by female partners. "Article 44 of Law 184 of 1983 permits this," she insists. Asked if she would agree to similar adoption in the case of a male gay couple, she responded, "If it were in the interest of the children, why not? It is the bonds of affection that count." She has, in fact, not allowed adoption in a few cases where these bonds were obviously lacking. As for surrogate mothers, "If I can donate a kidney to a relative or friend, who will in this way survive, where is the scandal in having a child born in the uterus of another?"

Needless to say, the Catholic Church in Italy does not favor this bill. If the stepchild adoption article is stripped off so as to ease approval of the civil unions bill, said one of its supporters in Parliament, "This will mean that the clergy front wins, and Renzi will have bowed to the dictates of the right, to [his number two in government Angelino] Alfano and to [the arch-conservative Catholic] Roberto Formigoni."

Another pressing issue is the flood of migrants into Italy, engorged by the relatively calm weather through Jan. 2. However difficult the migrants and their families are to absorb into society, many here are urging Italians to continue to be of help. On New Year's day former Premier Romano Prodi and his wife, Flavia, joined Bologna Archbishop Mons. Matteo Zuppi in a pro-migrant peace march on New Year's Day through the town center. Promoted by the Bologna church Pope John XXIII Community, this novel peace (and peaceful) march brought together 34 other organizations representing the homeless, Protestant churches, Muslims, migrants and refugees. At least 1,000 turned out; one local paper gave the figure at 2,000. "Fear and ignorance make us think we understand but instead they deform reality," Zuppi told the crowd. "Fear makes us believe that peace is impossible, and that love is ingenuous. It is exactly the opposite: it is unrealistic to build walls and believe that we are secure because our gates and our eyes are shut."

On a less solemn (but still telling) note, this is a country where heavy and expensive makeup is the order of the day, and the cosmetics market is estimated at almost \$500 million, third in Europe only to Germany and France. But even here a few hints of change are in the air: the latest news on the cosmetics front is that women are turning their backs on the old ways and beginning to seek out low-cost, bio-friendly cosmetics (NOC, short for natural and organic cosmetics), especially to avoid eye makeup containing such chemical ingredients as silicone.



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