

Let's call it hanseniasis *

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This has been discussed for over a decade. It was discussed during the last International Leprosy Congress, in Mexico, last November. A few countries, including Italy, have adhered to the proposition of eliminating the word "leprosy" from their private and official documents and institutions, and to replace it with the more modern, more scientific, more "polished" "Hanseniasis", after A. Hansen, the Norwegian doctor who discovered the bacillus *Mycobacterium leprae* in 1873.

Agreement on the usefulness and opportunity of that substitution is still very far away. Resistance is shown mostly by the Anglo-Saxon medical world, which considers "Leprosy" unchangeable, specially in the scientific field. Resistance is shown also by those — and quite a number — who emphasize the horror, the compassion and the abomination brought about by the vocable "Lebbra", to soften hearts and to loosen the purses. "Lebbra" and "lebbroso" are much more "profitable" than "Hanseniasis" and "hanseniani".

(Here enters a series of observations made in Italy by Prof. Baruffa about the personal and social trage-

dies caused by derogatory words like "rogna", "verola", "pelagra" and "lebbra".)

I believe that, at this point, the reader has understood why, years ago, I made my choice between "Lebbra" and "Hanseniasis".

The beneficiary of any medical or charitable activity must be the patient. He is not going to be benefited by exalting the error, the rejection, the marginalization imposed by a totally superated and fundamentally wrong medical and social interpretation. Welcome therefore to "hanseniasis": our young people will learn that the "hanseniano" is a patient like the others, not dangerous, perfectly curable. If, as expected, the semantic change provides a new cultural attitude as regards the patient and the disease, the results will doubtless be beneficial and quite superior to the most efficacious antibiotal and specific chemotherapy.

Yes because the drug might at best cure the "lebbra", never the "leper". Only by curing "hanseniasi" —will we obviously cure the "hansenian patient".

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