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The Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna held The Future of Logotherapy: The Second International Congress on Logotherapy and Existential Analysis in Vienna, Austria from May 15-18, 2014. Dwarfing the previous Congress Vienna 2012, The Second International Congress was attended by well over 320 persons from 30 countries. In fact, more persons attended than were expected; congress organizers stopped counting once the 320 mark was reached. Over 90 individual lectures were delivered in the three congress languages of German, English, and Spanish, while German and Russian were prominent at two very special events. Five lecture rooms located at the Billrothhaus of the Vienna Medical Society and at the Hotel Regina provided space for the large gathering and allowed individual lectures to be presented in 45-minute blocks. Most of the lectures used volunteer interpreters from among the attendees, though some events had professional interpreters speaking through headsets. Professor Alexander Batthyány, Ph.D., President of the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna and Director of the Viktor Frankl Archives, set a tone of inclusiveness, rigorous intellectual standards, and relaxed good humor throughout the event. The theme of the conference focused on how meaning, values, and the concept of the noetic person apply to the fields of physiology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, and related scientific disciplines.

Dr. h.c. Eleonore Frankl delivered a greeting message on the first day of the congress at the Billrothhaus. This is where Viktor Frankl first spoke following his release from the concentration camps. It is also where the future Eleonore Frankl heard him lecture for the first time. In her greeting, she reflected that she had not come to the Billrothhaus since her husband’s death, save for these congresses. She stressed the humanity of Viktor Frankl, noting that his personal life was very simple rather than glamorous. She reflected that every day of her life with him had been a gift. In German, she said, “Ich bin sehr dankbar, dass ich sein Ehefrau war.”

On the evening of Friday, May 16, 2014, Eleonore Frankl was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Department of Logotherapy at the Moscow Institute of Psychoanalysis. This marks her second honorary doctorate, the first having been bestowed in 1993 by North Park University in Chicago, Illinois. The ceremony was held in the exquisite Dome Hall of Vienna’s Natural History Museum, one of two palatial structures that face each other across the Maria-Theresien-Platz and that house multiple irreplaceable artifacts. Professor Dr. Alexander Batthyány opened the ceremony, while the laudation was given by Professor Dr. Dmitry Leontiev of the Department of Psychology at Lomonosov Moscow State University and who also
serves as deputy chair of the Moscow Branch of the Russian Psychological Society. Speaking in English, Dr. Leontiev recalled Eleonore Frankl’s visits to Moscow in 1986 and 1992, and his own visits to Vienna in 1991 and 2005. He praised her “openness, sincerity, integrity” and noted that the best way we can learn from extraordinary people like Eleonore Frankl is to learn from their personal example. Among the things to be learned from Eleonore Frankl are the love of life, the hardiness and resiliency required of a life that is not easy, and the positive attitude of saying “yes” to life. The ceremony continued with the faculty address by Dr. Svetlana Shtukareva of the Department of Logotherapy and member of the Academic Council of the Moscow Institute of Psychoanalysis. Speaking in Russian, her words were interpreted in German. The honorary doctorate was then conferred by Dean Dr. Lev I. Surat, Rector and President of the Moscow Institute of Psychoanalysis. Speaking in English, the doctorate was conferred with the words, “It is an honor for me to impart Dr. Eleonore Frankl the title of honorary doctorate of the Moscow Institute of Psychoanalysis for a life of outstanding service and contribution to the development and advancement of logotherapy.”

Giving her acceptance speech in English, Dr. Eleonore Frankl said, “I thank you from the bottom of my heart. What you have done for me you can’t imagine.” She reflected upon her life with Viktor Frankl, and their warm reception in places like Russia and Israel. “You should know you have made an old woman extremely happy,” she concluded.

On Sunday morning, May 18, 2014, Dr. Elisabeth Lukas was appointed as honorary professor of the Department of Logotherapy at the Moscow Institute of Psychoanalysis. The large assembly hall of the Billrothhaus was filled to its 300-seat capacity, while the surrounding balcony was also filled to capacity with some attendees standing. Professor Dr. Alexander Batthyány opened the ceremony and the laudation was given by Professor Dr. Otmar Wiesmeyr. Speaking in Russian with German interpretation, Dr. Svetlana Shtukareva delivered the faculty address while Dr. Lev I. Surat made the appointment.
Dr. Lukas then addressed the attendees in her first public speech in several years. She spoke in German with professional interpretation provided by headset to attendees in English, Spanish, and Russian. Her speech noted sweeping social and economic changes the world over across the several decades of her life, and yet the question of meaning remains constant. She told a story wherein Joseph Fabry, longtime friend of Viktor Frankl, shared with her the notion that the human conscience is not only a personal guide as described by Frankl, but also a tool of human progress. She expressed the hope that the contemporary growth in information technologies would be used increasingly for meaning-oriented purposes and that Frankl’s notion of monoanthropism might be increasingly reached as globalization grows. When she concluded her talk, Dr. Lukas was given a standing ovation by the more than 300 attendees present. Applause lasted more than 2 ½ minutes. The ceremony concluded when Walter Kohl, son of former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, gave a deeply moving and personal plenary address that highlighted the importance of Viktor Frankl to his own life and self-liberation.

Drs. Eleonore Frankl and Lukas were not the only ones to be afforded special recognition at The Second International Congress. On Saturday, May 17, 2014, twelve of the pioneers of logotherapy received Honorary Memberships in the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna. Awarded by Professor Dr. Alexander Batthyány, the recipients included: Geronimo Acevedo, Giosch Albrecht, Carl B. Becker, Karlheinz Biller, Leticia A. de Garcia, David Guttmann, Dmitry Leontiev, Jay I. Levinson, Nagata Katsutaro, Irmeli Sjölie, Otmar Wiesmeyr, and Helga Winter. Later that evening, all conference participants were honored by an invitation from the Mayor and Governor of Vienna to a cocktail reception at the magnificent City Hall. The event included a superb Viennese dinner and dance.

The many notable lectures at this conference included the opening plenary keynote and workshops by Dr. William S. Breitbart of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. He and his research team have now published evidence-based treatment manuals. These manuals for meaning-centered group and individual psychotherapy for patients with cancer are based largely upon traditional logotherapy; the principle difference is the addition of historical sources of meaning along with the familiar attitudinal, experiential, and creative sources. Moreover, Breitbart and his team has completed randomized controlled studies that demonstrate
the effectiveness of meaning-centered psychotherapy in enhancing spiritual well-being and a sense of meaning, as well as decreasing anxiety, hopelessness, and desire for death, compared to supportive psychotherapy in patients diagnosed with stage III and IV cancer.

As in 2012, a guided walking tour of Viktor Frankl’s Vienna concluded the conference. This time, however, registration was required. Dr. Batthyány joked that a “walk” of some 300 participants might well be thought of as a “demonstration.” The tour included professional interpretation in the languages of the participants as they visited the street on which Viktor Frankl met Sigmund Freud, the grounds of the University of Vienna where Frankl taught, and the Vienna Poliklinik that Frankl directed. The Poliklinik has recently been restored and contains several educational displays concerning Viktor Frankl. Some participants also visited the Viktor Frankl Center located in the apartment building where Viktor and Eleonore Frankl made their home. The Viktor Frankl Center contains multiple educational displays about Viktor Frankl and logotherapy, as well as some historical and personal items. At the time of the conference, the Viktor Frankl Center was expanding its space and preparing for the opening of the Viktor Frankl Museum.

The Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna has announced that its new periodical Logotherapy and Existential Analysis: Proceedings of the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna, Vol.1, is due to be published by Springer in 2016. The Future of Logotherapy III: Third International Congress on Logotherapy and Existential Analysis will be held on the campus of the University of Vienna September 23-25, 2016. More information can be found at the conference website www.viktorfrankl.info.

Note: Information in this article comes from the personal notes, audio recordings, and photographs of the author, as well as official conference materials retained by the author. Errors and oversights are the sole responsibility of the author.