Social Relations and Fraternity: a paradox or a sustainable model?

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Historically the different disciplines have as their formal objective an analysis of society or social themes; the research of an approach which also reflects a spirituality is unusual.

Obviously I am not referring to a study of religion as a factor of social change during different periods of history or as an integral component of social formation.

The formulation that I intend to offer is more ambitious: can spirituality in its entirety, or in one or more of its components, inspire theoretical reflections in our social disciplines? Can it inspire models of practical application or methodology? I'm perfectly aware that this is a controversial subject, one characterized by heated debates. In no way do I intend to pursue this type of discussion.

Rather, I would simply like to relate our experience, which, like every experience, is limited. It must be placed within a certain context and therefore undoubtedly opens itself to a thousand different analyses and objections. Notwithstanding this, I consider it valid to take this risk and to offer some of the first fruits of our efforts. I hope that these reflections can be perceived and accepted for what they are: an attempt to communicate something, which we believe and live and which defines who we are. I am sharing these fruits so that we can recognize even more clearly their validity.

Our point of departure is the Spirituality of the Focolare Movement. It is a spirituality of unity; therefore it is a communitarian spirituality, one that has a social influence. It inspires our study and research.

A spirituality offers a complete vision of human existence. It is a universal way to contemplate, understand, and live a reality from a religious point of view. A Christian spirituality views life, understands and lives it, from the perspective of one or more aspects of the message of the Gospel, of the message of Nazareth.[1]

The perspective of the spirituality of the Focolare is unity, that unity which is the fruit and fulfillment of love-agape. I am referring to that love which has the characteristics of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, with all its wealth, not only theological but also anthropological and social.

"Unity, writes Chiara Lubich, is the word that synthesizes our spirituality. Unity for us embraces every other supernatural reality, practice, commandment, and religious behaviour."[2]

Unity is not only understood for its spiritual value but also as a force capable of effectively uniting the human family. It does so by overcoming all divisions; not just territorial, but also those divisions, which are a consequence of political choices, and of ethnic, linguistic, social and religious conditions. (cf 1 Cor. 12)

Therefore we can accept and understand the Testament of Jesus – "That all may be one" (Jn. 17:12) – as an enormous resource for relationships of every kind. In its rejection of discrimination, war, controversy, and nationalism, it contains in itself the seed for every form of integration and unity,

Unity comprises every relationship among persons, groups, communities, and countries. It impacts, in the integration of various social actors, a set of values that gives it meaning and significance.

In its social context unity is called *fraternity,* an important concept that is not only Christian but also universal: "You are all brothers and sisters"(Mt. 23:8).

"Jesus, our model—we were convinced of this since the early days of the Movement—teaches us only two things that are really one: to be children of one Father and to be brothers and sisters of one another."[3]

Chiara Lubich further affirms: " In revealing that God is our Father and that all men and women are brothers and sisters, Jesus introduces the idea of humanity as one family, made possible by universal brotherhood put into practice. He knocks down the walls, which separate those who are "the same" from those who are "different," friends from enemies. Jesus frees all people from every unjust relationship, thus carrying out an authentic existential, cultural and political revolution."[4]

Throughout the centuries there is a history of fraternity informing and penetrating religious, social and political life, as well as that of institutions. This history knows moments of theoretical and practical success. (We can't but recall the monastic fraternity that determined the rebirth of Europe between the fifth and the sixth century; or that of the "*Reduciones*" of the Jesuits in Paraguay, a true example of a cultural encounter in evangelization, which brought about economic and social growth).

There is also failure and bitter betrayal (it's enough to recall the Crusades in the Middle East, the religious wars in Europe that brought about so much suffering and death, the pillaging of Africa during the colonial era). Yet it's possible, and even necessary, to identify a path of growth and maturity in brotherhood, no matter how uneven and winding it is.

Fraternity emerges in modern times as a social and political reality in the trinomial of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity. We read in the Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen (1789): "All men are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and must act toward one another in a spirit of fraternity."

Truly this trinomial gives a face to the dynamism of a humanity that is one and multifaceted. It is one in the recognition of the dignity of each person and in the affirmation of equality and many-sided in the diversity of its cultural, social and political expressions, etc.

The ideological reading of these values gave life to various historical interpretations, which contrasted—at times very harshly with one another.

The bourgeois spirit interpreted *liberty* predominantly as an increase of economic power and individual freedom. In fact it favoured the capitalists and those who owned the means of production to the detriment of the rising proletariat. *Equality* found its place as a solemn affirmation in juridical codes but gradually became more a matter of form and less real. *Fraternity* was reduced to a narrow accord of interests of the privileged class. In reality it was disregarded, far removed from every social and political reflection and practice.

As a reaction to this, there developed a socialist or scientific collectivism. Liberty was understood almost exclusively on an economic level, to the detriment of a deeper and more profound freedom. Equality became egalitarianism, and fraternity was confined to the restricted space of the classes.

Perhaps today a more complete and richer interpretation of this trinomial is possible in order to find a new equilibrium among the three principles.[5] History itself seems to indicate that fraternity is the foundation of the entire edifice, the amalgam that binds the other two and gives them meaning. Why? Because Fraternity is reciprocity at its best. This, in turn, offers us a greater possibility to understand the authentic meaning of equality and liberty.

"Fraternity is the basic principle of the trinomial; it is its vital guarantee. Liberty conditions the others in that it has the capacity to promote the freedom of the other. The verifying element is the universal application."[6]

The comprehension of social relations throughout the history of sociology is made possible by the different paradigms that have enlightened it, often times in opposition to one another. The knowledge of relational dynamics passes through the analysis of *integration* (Durkheim), of *competition* (Weber) of *alienation* (Marx) of *conflict* (Dahrendorf) and the like. In turn the paradigms are based on a postulate that has to do with an anthropological vision. Without this postulate, an explanation of the same social reality would be very difficult if not impossible. In addition there is almost unanimous consent that these paradigms were influenced by, and therefore they are indebted to, the social-cultural context in which they were conceived and in which they were developed and lived. This relationship between sociological theory and its historical-social context has already been clearly outlined by Professor Iorio in his presentation.

Currently we find ourselves in the midst of a structural-cultural change of noteworthy importance and of unknown outcome. The rapidity of changes taking place, their influence on lifestyles, knowledge and culture, not to mention in the social-political sphere, is such as to predict a new type of society. A society whose make-up, the values it aspires to (or anti-values), its principal lines of thought, its systems of communication and its political-social order are unimaginable at this time.

The noted philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn, affirmed that every scientific revolution—and there's no doubt that the actual change has this connotation—not only transforms the scientific imagination, but also the very world in which the scientific work is taking place.[7]

Can this new situation that is developing generate new paradigms, which are capable of creating new social theories?

Or can we say that the rise of a new paradigm indicates that the present society needs a new point of reference, a new perspective to illuminate, to explain its characteristics, to clarify its aspirations and reach out towards new goals?

In the actual panorama of social sciences we have new interpretive models being presented, such as the *network* (Barnes –Bott), the *gift* (Caillé, Godbout) and s*ocial relationships* (Touraine, Donati, Bajoit). All of these are searching for a new way to interpret this late era of modernity. However, we believe that the binomial *unity-fraternity* can constitute a paradigm or an innovative model capable of leading the social sciences along

uncharted and unexplored paths. It is especially so in the case of sociology and the field of social politics and social existence. This conviction doesn't arise only from a theoretical fact, but from the observation of the strong influence that unity-fraternity has on the behaviour and on the choices of millions of people, individuals and groups, whose work, in the most varied sectors of social life, is carried out worldwide.

The Focolare Movement with its eight million members and adherents—in its various branches, mass movements, social projects, little towns of witness, dialogue on all fronts—represents a formidable laboratory where one experiments what it means to believe in and live "unity-fraternity" as the inspiring principle of living together.

Such a reality is no longer a marginal bit of news but is recognized today, also by scientists, as a social phenomenon with definite influence on society. On the occasion of the

conferral of an honorary doctorate in social science to Chiara Lubich by the University of Lublin (Poland), Professor Adam Biela—at the time dean of that faculty—affirmed in his *Laudatio*: "The action of the Focolare Movement constitutes a living example of the application in social relationships of the *paradigm of unity*. It is certainly necessary for the social sciences so that they acquire a new force of application—capable of curing and preventing social pathology, conflicts, psychogenic illnesses, manifest aggression, wars and crimes (…)"

The social activity of Chiara Lubich, imbued with the charism of evangelical unity, constitutes a vital inspiration as well as an example for the social sciences. It urges them to create an *interdisciplinary paradigm of unity*, as the methodological foundation for the construction of theoretic models, of strategies of empirical research and of designs of application. Chiara Lubich, together with her collaborators (first women and then also men) has created a new social phenomenon that has indicated that the application of the new paradigm of unity is possible and has a very inspiring role to play. I am convinced that it could indeed be at the foundation of social sciences and be as significant as the Copernican revolution was for natural sciences."[8]

These words are very challenging, but equally true, if we think of them as expressing not a finished work, but as having the potential of a charism that aspires (and has already begun for a long time now) to become a concrete fact. Therefore words that invite one to a fascinating work of study and research!

Having said that, in spite of my fear and sense of limitations I would still like to offer a few initial indications of the contents that are implicit in the model "unity-fraternity."

It is not of course the draft of a theory. These are mere reflections, departure points for further in depth work that we hope to continue now, and possibly also in the future, together with all of you.

1. Unity-fraternity as relation

One could think that our discussion on the value of the person in a certain way would have us distance ourselves from holistic approaches, and have us prefer those of methodological individualism that put the social actor and his choices at the centre of our construction of the theory. But it's not like that at all. First of all the category of the

individual can be meager, abstract, closed, while the idea of the person seems rich in identity, in values, and above all, in societal and communitarian relations: in one word, rich in history.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, "Affirming that human life is essentially, and not only casually, living together, one again puts the concept of the individual as the ultimate social atom to question. If at the very foundation of his existence man is, because others, who are his similars are, and only because of them, is he what he is, then his ultimate definition is not that of indivisibility and singularity in origin, but rather that of a necessary participation and communication with others. Before his being -also an individual - man is one of his "similars." He relates to others before referring explicitly to himself. It is a moment of relationship which he must live before he can eventually be able to be self-determining. All this is expressed in the concept of the person…"[9]

Person means relationship, the possibility and the ability to put oneself before the *other* and be recognized by the other. "The person emerges towards all of us and towards each one only when the recognition contains in itself both the designation - an empiric, cognitive indication and the reaction of the same designation-indication. Through the designation-indication I recognize that the *other* is a plumber, a faculty colleague, a fruit vendor. The person emerges when the designation triggers a moral reaction, and therefore the *other* is included in the moral universe of the self placing him within a responsibility free of sanction and of exchange.[10]

Persons form relationships which envelop them, comprehend them, transform them, conditioning them from the outside and stimulating them from the inside. The relationship then becomes a *reality* among two or more persons, which is born and nourished by their being and by their actions. This relationship in turn nourishes their being and actions. It helps them to grow and mature in a given way and with an increasing depth of life.[11]

A primary quality of unity-fraternity inspired by a Christian perspective is its *universality*. This means that fraternal relations stretch beyond the bonds of family relationships to reach and embrace every human being: man or woman, citizen or foreigner, of my own race or another race, country, ethnic group, or religion. Every human being is considered and welcomed as a brother, a sister.

One can also assert that all are brothers and sisters because the entire human race is gathered together by Christ as a unique family. Fraternity is a value so constitutive of humanity and so universal that one finds it affirmed to some degree in all the major religions.[12]

To remain within a Christian framework and bring it to its ultimate consequences, it's necessary to add that the prayer of Christ before he went towards his passion and death, "So that all may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be one in us." (Jn. 17:21), indicates the Trinitarian relationship among the three Divine Persons as the foundation and model of the relationships between human beings.

The mutual giving of the Three in an agape-relationship constitutes their being Person.

Likewise this occurs among human beings. "The more you give, the more you are fulfilled, the more you are; because one has what one gives. What one gives makes him be."[13]

2. Unity-fraternity requires unity and distinction

In order for the relationship of unity-fraternity to be fulfilled it contemporaneously requires action of unity and of distinction. To recognize the simultaneous presence of both elements is not only important but also necessary. A well-conceived unity reinforces and realizes a healthy symbiosis between the parts of the relations even though they remain distinct. Distinction, in turn, sustains, preserves and guards the identity of each one. It impedes any absorption, dependence, or submission, and at the same time maintains it in unity.

It is only thanks to distinction that each one becomes an actor and takes the initiative to nourish and enrich unity.

Distinction brings about a differentiation that in a certain way signifies "opposition", not in the sense of counter position, contrast or conflict, but in the sense that each one "being the other" becomes more fully himself.

How is this possible? That this being in relationship doesn't lead to mutual exclusion?

The true inter-subjectivity such as unity in distinction or in difference is possible when one has a deep cognitive and affective experience both of one's self and that of the other to the point of accepting oneself and the others as autonomous *centres* of being: conscious of self, of being free; equal in one's dignity and at the same time, different.

Difference also means the awareness that one has something unique to offer the other or to offer all together. It's this awareness that gives rise to the dynamic and the necessity to know how to take the initiative, to give new impulse to unity and the readiness to lose one's eventual *gifts* if it is not the moment to offer them.

And so, not only is each one *not* the other, but also each one is himself only *through* the other. On the one hand unity produces a very intense fusion and an intimate community of feeling, yet on the other hand, it never annuls the distinction.

One can also hypothesize a fraternal relationship that involves unity-distinction not only at a micro level but also at a macro level: among communities, peoples, nations, religions, institutions.

The process of globalization would require it as a necessary dimension of the new social reality that is being envisaged. Fraternity would be able to activate a new and innovative *plus* in international relations. It is certainly difficult and complex to articulate and realize, but it is feasible and decisive for the future of humanity. In fact, seen in this light history offers examples that cannot be disregarded.

3. Unity-fraternity as reciprocity

One of the dynamic strengths of social action is that it is *reciprocal*.

Weber indicated reciprocity as a dynamism of social action. Simmel followed suit and defined all that comes about in a social relation as reciprocal action.

Social relation is the fundamental theoretic category that must be understood as interaction, or reciprocal action.

"For Simmel the social phenomenon is not the emanation of a subject nor even of an abstract system more or less situated a-priori. It is the relation in itself - that is the reciprocal action in as much as the inter-action that it produces; that is incorporated and is manifested in something that, even though it is not visible, has its own *"solidity."* [14]

Simmel himself explains how this process, that gives life to a new reality that has its own life beyond the elements from which it is derived, is constituted among individuals.

"The life of society consists in the reciprocal relations of its elements—mutual relations which in part are developed into actions and reactions at a given time, and in part are consolidated in definite structures: in duties and laws, statutes and properties, language and means of communication. All these reciprocal social effects are born from the same determined interests, aims and impulses. At the same time they form the social fabric that comes about as the individuals' being together: one next to the other, one for the other, or one with the other."[15]

Both Weber and Simmel seek to explain this reciprocity: as being dictated by the meaning given by the subject (Weber), or in view of determined aims (Simmel).

We can say that unity-fraternity generates reciprocity in love - that is agape, a mirror and a reflection of Trinitarian Agape ("God is Love" 1 Jn. 4:8). "The God of religion is the God of relation: unity conceived as interaction."[16] We find ourselves in front of a particular type of love that is not added to human loves (paternal, maternal, filial, that of friends, of spouses) but that moulds them, and sustains all the possibilities of love in their varied nuances. And so every type of human love is fully such in the measure in which it is modelled on fraternity.

Reciprocity, according to the Trinitarian model, in the concretization of Jesus' commandment: "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other." (Jn. 13:34), means mutual indwelling, or mutual containment, being mutually one in the other and the other in the one. The subjects, who are so contained in one another, unite by distinguishing themselves and distinguish themselves by being united.

Fraternal relationship is essentially reciprocal, as a movement that is outgoing and receptive. It is enriched with values such as trust, of welcome, of listening, of giving and sharing. It moves towards overcoming and resolving contrast, conflict, opposition and breakdown.

The consequence is the full, authentic realization of the inter-subjectivity of the actors involved in the relation when they live a reciprocal commitment toward one another. In this way there are the conditions for an ever-increasing fulfillment of the person.

4.   Unity-fraternity as a gift

Today the gift is being presented as a "third paradigm"[17] that goes beyond methodological individualism and collective holism, that responds to the preceding paradigms, having as its logic, freedom and gratuity in its three constitutive moments: the time of giving, of receiving and of restitution.

From a sociological point of view, the gift seems to be a strong point of reference in the description, the comprehension and the interpretation of the dynamics of social relations.

"The gift contains an undeniable implication of sociality and relationship; there is a concretization of expressions and of consequences present in it, which is independent of the interior or internal orientation of the intention that one gives it with—for example, charitable, philanthropic or "interested". [18]

The sociologists of MAUSS—Anti-utilitarian Movement in the social sciences—define gift as "every form of goods and services given without guaranty of restitution, with the purpose of creating, increasing, or recreating the social bond among persons.[19]

The problem of *restitution* as a constitutive and indispensable element of gift was already raised by Marcel Mauss in his "*Essai sur le don*" in 1924. He did not however resolve the question like many other authors and the problem remained an open one.

An attempt at a solution was made through the research for a logic of reciprocity as an explanation of the necessity of restitution. Reciprocity would be the reason of the counter-concession in all situations. The question that persists is: does the responsibility of the actors still remain in the act of giving, of receiving and of counter exchange?

Recently in a conference in Germany, the philosopher Paul Ricouer, under the influence of M. Henaff ("The price of truth") indicated a new solution:

"(If the actors) want to be truly the actors of reciprocity, the only way open is to say that the gift is the pledge and the substitute of a reciprocal recognition that in fact is not acknowledged; therefore the recognition cannot be vouched for except as a pledge of the gift.. (…)

"The gift is without price: it's not that it didn't have a cost; but in the act of exchange its price is not apparent—it is *priceless*. And it is in the non commercial experiences that the gift can be a pledge and as a substitute for reciprocal recognition."[20]

Here is how Simmel explains the reciprocal action of giving and the acceptance of the gift: "In every giving there is a spiritual value that goes beyond the intrinsic value of the gift. We absolutely cannot dissolve or annul the interior bond that was created by the acceptance of the gift, with another gift, which is its equivalent on the outside. The gift's acceptance is not only a passive enrichment, but also a concession of the giver. Just as in giving so also in receiving there is a predilection shown that goes far beyond the value of the object." [21]

In unity-fraternity the gift is lived in an even greater and more profound dimension that envelops our very being.

"I myself sensed, - Chiara Lubich wrote - that I had been created as a gift for those who are near to me and that those who are near to me have been created by God as a gift for me, as the Father in the Trinity is everything for the Son and the Son is everything for the Father."[22]

Moreover fraternity reveals and explains the very essence of what the gift consists of. "Man gives origin to societies thanks to a radical *generosity* that he finds inscribed in his

being, in his life, in his intelligence and love, which permits a dialogue with others and a superabundance of the gift of self."[23]

A human being, therefore, is a being made for giving, and this quality is transferred to all the bonds and to all the relationships in which he is involved.

Gift then, is synonymous with love. The gift is none other than love in action. Not only does it not close in on itself, but also in itself is diffusive. Love requires the gift. It asks every social agent, individual or collective to be transformed and to act as a giver.

"To love means to give oneself: to think of one's brother (or sister) by stepping into his shoes…(Lubich, *Unedited Writings*).

The fraternal relationship, complete symbol of love-agape, is thus weighted with substance. It's a pure gift but doesn't disdain exchange and reciprocity; on the contrary it requires it, but with a noble profile. It doesn't include what one can buy, sell, possess and consume, but it rises towards liberty and love.
The gift of self to the other is also manifested in giving spiritual and material goods, as a sharing and communion of goods. "In this way love circulates and (through its inherent law of communion) like a river of fire, naturally carries along with it, all that the two possess in order to achieve a communion of both their material and spiritual goods."[24]
The sharing and the communion of goods reinforce fraternal bonds and create a true art of giving which is abundant in other expressions that are very precise: gratuity, oblation, broadmindedness, joy, and reciprocity.

5. Unity-fraternity as communion

The category "communion" is not used much in sociology. As a matter of fact I would say it is distant from sociological language and, in a certain sense, almost unknown.

And yet today it is gaining ground and emerging as a very rich concept with many valences.
Obviously, it is above all a *category* that is widely used and is at home in the realm of spirituality and Christian theology. In fact, in this sense, one can assert that communion finds its generating font from the communion of life of God himself in his being Trinity, a communion of love among Persons.

Trinitarian communion is therefore the ontological foundation of every form of communion, as substance and as life. And it is thus that it also becomes an *anthropological category*.

John Paul II in the encyclical letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* affirms: "Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a new model of the unity of the human race (…). This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three Persons, is what we Christians mean by the word *communion*". (n. 40)

The eminent theologian Klaus Hemmerle, former bishop of Achen, emphasizes and explains this relation between divinity and humanity: "Our personal being is assumed into the

communion of life and love among the Father, Son and Spirit; but with that I, and only I, can no longer represent the point of departure and the final point of my being, but I can live the Trinitarian existence only in reciprocity, in "we," that nonetheless doesn't dissolve the I and the you, but constitutes them."[25]

It is evident that, even if we do not consider this spiritual foundation, the social relationship implicit in our living together known as interaction, is complete in communion.

It is thus that communion gives rise also to an *economic category* with the "Economy of Communion." This economic project launched by Chiara Lubich in 1991 in Brazil rests on two major tenets: the sharing of the enterprise's profits with the needy and the insertion of communion in economic relationships. If the first element demands surmounting the culture of having to assume the culture of giving, the second implies overriding the formal or instrumental rationality and the assumption of an "expressive" rationality that is not instrumental. The businesses that adhere to the Project of the Economy of Communion are enucleating the lines of conduct for the enterprise that revolve around the concept of communion as the essence of business relationships both internally (with the workers, clients, suppliers, etc) and externally (with competitors, governing bodies, the surrounding environment, etc). This approach implies that one gives priority to the motivations and values in interpersonal relations, and emphasizes themes such as trust, reciprocity, etc.

The economy of communion offers economic science a new stimulus and new possibilities for resolving its own contradictions with its negative effects; it forms a "virtuous" circle where new elements that are more positive and that offer new proposals find their place.

Communion also finds space as a *juridical category* within the so-named Social Law that derives directly from the functioning of social groups.[26]

Georges Gurvitch was the one who worked best to establish the tradition that widened into "Social Law", which he also named "the Law of Communion".

According to Gurvitch ""Social Law" is an autonomous right of communion that integrates in objective form every active real totality, and that incarnates a positive extra-temporal value. This right is derived directly from the "totality" in question in order to regulate its interior life independently from the fact that this "totality" is organized or not organized. The "Right of communion" allows participation in the "totality" directly through the juridical relation that emanates from it without transforming this "totality " into a subject separate from its members."[27]

Therefore we can say that the "Right of communion" and communion find their own justification, the one in the other, respectively.

This social "totality"—for the theorists of social Law—has the significance of an "immanent communion," therefore of a reality both ethical-juridical and formal-juridical.

In the formal-juridical meaning this "immanent communion" indicates both the human community that constitutes it and the fact that we find ourselves in front of something that Gierk has named a "complex juridical person." It is characterized by the fact that the "totality" is not transcendent in respect of the members that comprise it, but neither can it be equated with the members in question or even with their sum.

We can therefore really define communion in ethical and juridical terms in respect of the spirit of fraternity.

Finally and even more so, communion is a *sociological category*.

In one of his fundamental works Gurvitch makes a profound analysis of the manifestation of sociality derived from the partial fusion of the subjects. According to the degree, the intensity and the depth of this fusion, he distinguishes three forms of sociality, which he calls a "We". These three forms are the Mass, the Community and the Communion. He then amply describes the relations that the I, the He and the Others form internally within the "We."

A "we" (such as "we French," "we militant union members," "we students," "we parents") constitutes a totality that cannot be reduced to the plurality of its members, a new unity that cannot be taken apart from the whole. Nevertheless the whole tends to be immanent to the parts, and the parts immanent to the whole. This reciprocal indwelling, which could also be defined as a mutual participation of unity in plurality and of plurality in unity can assume varied forms in the different "We."[28]

Communion represents the maximum degree of intensity of participation, of the force of attraction and of the depth of fusion of the "We." If we look at the heart of the "We", where the fusion is the greatest and "reunites the most personal and the most intimate depths of the I and of the Other, no aspect remains outside the participation and the integration of the "We."[29]

Gurvitch's reflections are developed in the field of micro sociology and are of unquestionable interest for a greater understanding of face-to-face relationships.

In the case of fraternal relations a series of correlated dynamics are expressed that enrich, give singleness of purpose and further meaning to the relation itself. In fact it includes being one *with* the others, where freedom and the absolute choice to enter and to participate in the relation come into evidence. Being one *for* the other brings into evidence the "how" of the relation, that is, its modality. Being one *in* the other underlines the capacity to be and to make a gift of self to the others. Being one *thank*s to the other, brings to light the fact that the identity of each one can best be expressed in the reciprocal communion of each other.

In the fraternal relationship we can further assert that the depths of the relations, the intensity of the interaction and the feelings of love, esteem, affection, trust—raised to a universal level—form relationships of communion. On all levels in social reality these relationships are able to inspire a positive current which fosters harmony, equilibrium, order - and because of this - progress, development and perfection to a considerable degree. All elements particularly requested by a society characterized by social instability, alienation and contrasts.

NOTES

1 "As we have indicated, Christian spiritualities interest us in as much as they are ways to live (that is to put into practice in daily life, in a particular religious group) what a spiritual person, his disciples and their followers retain as authentic demands and ethics of the Gospel message. Consequently we are interested in how many live this spirituality—according to our ideal-type--how many commit themselves to live it, at least as an aspiration, in a total and systematic way, open to producing effects; religious and social effects, direct and indirect,

sought after and not sought after. In this, one can recognize a Weberian perspective." (J. Seguy *Chrétiens èvangéliques et spiritualités: quelques réflexions sociologiques*, in J: BUCHOLD [ed.], *La spiritualité et les chrétiens évangéliques*, Edifac, Vaux sur Seine 1998, pp.149-150).

2 C.LUBICH, *La dottrina spirituale*, Mondadori, Milano 2001, p.57.

3 Ibidem, p.59.

4 Idem, *L'Europa unita per un mondo unito*, in "Nuova Umanità", 146 (2003), p. 140.

5 " Unlike liberty and equality whose contradictions become more acute when they are more integral, there is the attempt of the correct application of principles. Fraternity seems to be able to resolve its intrinsic contradictions merely by enlarging its sphere of application and by recognizing as an integral and absolute value, the universal fraternity of men and women who share a common destiny. Perhaps today this concept is less utopian than in the past, given the growing economic and cultural interdependence between all the peoples of the world and of the threat to the survival of the human species caused by atomic death and ecological disaster." (A. MARTINELLI, *The principles of the French Revolution and Modern Society*, in A.MARTINELLI, M.SALVATI, S.VECA *Progetto 89 – Tre saggi su libertà, eguaglianza, fraternita,* Il Saggiatore, Milano 1989, pp.143-144).

6 S. PALUMBIIERI, *Homo planetarius*, in M. MANTOVANI, S. THURUTHIYIL (ed.) *Quale globalizzazione?* LAS. Roma 2000, p.245.

7 T. KUHN, *La struttura delle rivoluzione scientifiche*, Einaudi, Torino 1978.

8.A. Biela, Una rivoluzione copernicana per le scienze sociali, in "Nuova Umanità", 108 (1996), pp. 703-704.

9 M. HORKHEIMER, T.W. ADORNO, *Lezioni di Sociologia*, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Torino 1966, pp.53-54.

"The 'Self', to the degree that it can be an object by itself, is essentially a social structure, and rises from social experience. After a self is formed, in a certain sense it furnishes for itself its own social experience. As a consequence of that, it is possible to conceive of a "Self" that comes up out of social experience. Once the "Self" is formed, we can imagine it as a person that is segregated for the rest of his life, but that still has himself as a companion. He is able to think and converse with himself in the same way he communicated with others before." (MEAD.G.H., *Mente, Sé e Società*, Barbera, Firenze 1966. pp. 158-159).

10 F.PARDI, *Concetto di persona nella società complessa*, in "Studi di Sociologia" 1 (2003), p.7.

11 For Donati the relation "is the fundamental category of being and of acting in society, to the degree that we understand the latter as the field of inter-subjective relations and structural relations in all its possible forms." (P. DONATI, *Introduzione alla Sociologia relazionale,* Franco Angeli Editori, Milano 1993, p.244).

12 "My mission is not simply the brotherhood of Indian humanity. But through the actualisation of the liberty of India, I hope to actualise and develop the mission of brotherhood among peoples." (M.K.Gandhi, *Antiche come le montagne*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano 1970, p. 162).

"I have a dream that one day men will realize that they have been created to live together as brothers; and that brotherhood will become the first item on the agenda for a business man and the watchword for government official." (M.L. KING, cit. in *Il fronte della coscienza*, SEI, Torino 1968, p. 2).

13 C. LUBICH, *Congress Gen 1995,* in "Citta Nuova" 11 (1995), p. 36.

14 P. DONATI, *Teoria relazionale della società*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1994, p. 46.

15 G. SIMMEL, *La religione*, Bulzoni, Roma 1994, p. 68.

16 IDEM, *Saggi di sociologia della religione*, Borla, Roma 1993, p.228.

17 A. CAILLE', *Il terzo paradigma – antropologia filosofica del dono*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1998.

18 G. GASPARINI, *Elementi per una sociologia del dono,* in AA.VV. *Il dono—tra etica e scienze social*, Ed. Lavoro, Roma 1999, p.18.
19 J.T. GODBOUT – A. CAILLE', *Lo spirito del dono*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1998, p.30
20 P. RICOEUR, *Il riconoscimento, il dono*, in "Il Regno" 6 (2004), p. 180.
21 G. SIMMEL, *La religione*, cit., p. 73.
22 C. LUBICH, *Spiritualità dell'unità e vita trinitaria*, in "Nuova Umanità" 151 (2004), pp. 15-16.
23 M. TOSO, *Umanesimo sociale*, LAS, Roma 2002, p. 437.
24 C. LUBICH, *Unedited notes*, quoted by G. Rossé, *La spiritualità collettiva di Chiara Lubich nella luce di Paolo*, "Nuova Umanità", 107 (1996), p. 538.
25 IDEM, *Risurrezione di Roma*, in "Nuova Umanità" 102 (1995), p.6.
26 K. HEMMERLE, *Partire dall'unità*, Città Nuova, Roma 1998, p. 45.
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28 GURVITCH G., *L'idée du droit social*, Librairie du Recueil Sirey, Paris 1932, reprinted 1972, p. 15. During the same period another work of the same author was published which is the continuation of the first : *Le temps présent et l'idée du droit social.*
29 IDEM*, La vocazione attuale della sociologia*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1965, p. 165.
30 Ibidem, p. 207.