

# CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN FRATERNITY

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## Introduction

First of all allow me to thank Tommaso Sorgi, the friend and professor of Sociology with whom I have worked for many years in the beginning of my university engagement. To him they owe the only monographic paths in Italy on Sorokin, when Citta' Nuova in 1974 took the task of translating and publishing *Storia delle teorie sociologiche* in two volumes. Sociology was not only a teaching job but also an enjoyment to the intellect and the soul, in search of truth and in fruitful dialogue, united me with my husband Attilo Danese, although belonging to another discipline. It was not without thought that the topics discussed and the method of teaching used attracted a large number of students.

When this community pilot project was interrupted because of Professor Sorgi's transfer, the structure of teaching and some institutes of Italian sociology were seen to be trapped far away from that happy island. In this discipline, as in others, not few experience running into an academic world which is based on theoretical assumptions, hierarchies, and oversight, if not at times contradicting, to the individual.

For these reasons it seems that the Congress organized by the Focolare Movement is a real and true answer, at a distance in time, to our aspirations and an academy in the original sense, like a community of communal life and research, in open confrontation between teachers and disciples. Our small world of the University of Teramo was only a first prophecy interrupted by, at a certain time, what the Convention of sociologists is

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carrying out, consenting to meet on new and interesting paths. It is rekindling, therefore, the hope of thinking together and building a small “world-Citadel”, where sociology can be placed on a pillar of interpersonal reciprocity.

For this rekindling of hope, I thank Vera Araujo and all those who have organized a Congress which I have followed with great attention and gathered reflections and stimuli which I here wish to share with you.

### **1. Innovative aspects of the Congress**

The Congress has shown the possibility of practicing sociology in a brotherly and constructive atmosphere.

I would like to point out some of the salient peculiarities:

- *The reasonable organization* and ‘human’ aspect of times, which has led us to come to know each other and confront each other on the topics discussed while meeting in the corridors, at the bar, in the meeting hall.
- *The union between art and speech.* The musical intervals and dance manifestations and singing are very rare in University Congresses. But there still existed continuity and a reciprocal fruitfulness between art and reflection that benefits the assimilation of the content and the participation of the person as a whole (not only intellectually).
- *The union between theory and standard procedure.* The value of listening to stories from real life, experiences shared and the Report on Africa all put question-marks to the sociologist and induce him to confront himself with everyday life beyond text books, leaving him to question them.
- *The continuity that discontinues between science and spirituality.* I believe that in the academic field, especially for believers, they are not few who feel that they need to put back in order these two spheres although respecting their methodological differences and content. Maybe in Italy this demand is felt even more, because, since we find here the central seat of Catholicism, in

reality there is still a clear separation between theology, studied in the Università Pontificia or in diocesan institutes, and the 'scientific disciplines', studied in the state universities. Theology is considered as a science in itself, a discipline reserved for those who are preparing for priesthood or religious life, or to teach religion and catechism. It is a separation, which is not useful for the "lay" person who risks on staying on empirical superficiality without a sense of orientation and not even theology itself, which can remain closed in its 'golden ghetto' without noticing how much he owes to the critical requests of the lay world. Simplifying slightly the speech, it happens that those who have faith have to take into account their surroundings in which it is more productive to hide talking on faith if they want to be in line with prevailing indifference and agnosticism. God is banished from scientific areas and so culture remains impoverished.

## **2. Which Type of Sociology**

Vincenzo Zani, in his opening paper, has stated that one of the tasks of sociology with a Christian inspiration has to be that of being observant in what is developing in this discipline and intercepting the positive ideas actually laid out, collecting the best, putting them in prominence, sharing and looking in depth. This positive attitude of selective openness reveals a cooperative will that already on its own, supercedes the old conflicting ideologies and favour a spirit of collaboration.

All this integrated with the capacity of laying down new themes, in order to avoid that the catholic world goes in tow, maybe ten years too late, the main themes that others consider permanent in sociology, at a disadvantage to those more coherent with the real projects. In fact, the objective of the discipline varies according to how it is applied in the study, in relation to times and different contexts (that we can say that sociology of Comte confronts the same topics as those of Habermas?).

It is noted that huge sums of money are granted by boards to study themes, which for us can result secondary in relation to objectives that we propose and that have primarily to do with the well-being of the human person and society. Even in this possibility of launching proper themes and not only relaunching those others imply a force that we do not have at present, it is not excluded.

The force is dated by the fact that one does not remain isolated in the wide 'market' of ideas. I would add, a pilot group of sociologists who also have the task of creating a network. Lubino's colleague spoke of Kuln. This scholar has underlined the importance of creating a real and proper scientific community in which the themes are shared and the language is a common one. It is a privileged way to promote the exchange of a science and of giving importance to themes which otherwise would be automatically discarded. The community selects the themes, discusses them, shares them and launches them. This goes beyond the particularity of a single 'genius' in search of talents and self-celebrity, and at the same time, gives consent to each scholar to speak knowing that there is someone who listens and so his views do not fall onto alienated cultures.

The congress has justifiably placed to the sociologist's attention how the object-subject is the person. Vera Araujo has spoken clearly giving it the *way* and all of us have justifiably found it. The person is the common reference of how we want to study society not as a system of self-regulation, aseptic and often inhuman, but as a network of reports that make the person their head, conditioned both by different cultures as well as by institutions, contexts in which they live but fundamentally free and responsible<sup>1</sup>. They retain, but, that a person on his own, or even two or three, that support new ideas in the academic sphere is not enough. Returning to Tommaso Sorgi's experience, he confirms the necessity of maintaining a scientific community that can change, in a manner that the seed falling on fertile ground can mature.

<sup>1</sup> For a more profound theory on this subject permit me to suggest my book *Per un'ecologia della società*, Dehoniane, Roma 1994 (sp. Cap. 1 and 2)

The effect before this change of recomposition between culture and ethic must come to light, not only as theoretical speech, that is exploited, but like the credibility of actors of culture, of persons who make sociology. The inconsistency removes confidence in the persons involved, and as a consequence, to all the discipline. If sociology is going through a period of discredit and a state of disciplinary crisis, probably it is also because there aren't persons who are culturally, ethically and humanly capable of attracting confident investments. It happens like a bank that does not attract its investors' confidence and so the investors withdraw their capital and the bank goes bankrupt. The challenge of a new sociology that this congress is launching is this: The Focolare Movement through the culture of unity creates new persons and through these it can start to try and build a new scientific community open to those who are sensitive to these themes.

### **3. The Theme of Fraternity**

The theme proposed in the Congress is that of brotherhood. One is not limited to an invitation *omiletico* but it is founded on the themes as a privileged object of social study and possibly germinate a friendly society (one thinks of the relationships of Gennaro Iorio and the presentation of *The Power of Love* by Sorokin, in the part of Michele Colasanto). Brotherhood is a guide, a frame of referral or a horizon in a positive sense, that reveals the propulsive force of society, a stimulant for all the social sciences. We cannot but hide from the possible traps in this vocabulary, precious but easily manipulated and confused with "false idols".

One of the tasks of sociology is that of "falsifying" a concept, of passing it through a purifying fire of their drifts and their denials. The negative reveals the limitations and unmasks their idols. It means asking by name what would make us feel as brothers.

For example:

- We need to exclude brotherhood that identifies with blood relations. The catastrophic consequences of fraternal quarrels would be too evident like that of Abel and Cain who have marked the story of humanity. The fight between Polinice and Eteocle is a fundamental referral in Greek culture with its correlated myth of Edipo and Antigone. The image of fratricidal brotherhood had become a topic in world literature.
- In the name of class? Even in this case the traditional dichotomy of friends-enemies is seen. Marxism, that has staked all on its theory of a flexible and vindictive justice, making incompatible pardon and justice, has fed hatred for the middle class and built relationships of “solidarity” only in the proletarian class. Restricted fraternity is easily transferred into an instrument of oppression and injustice.
- In the name of *oligarchy* of power? This will be brotherhood in aristocracy, of the *elite* as counter opposed to the people that find themselves in high positions, showing sympathy to those who defend their privileges, letting a few into the centre of their inarguable judgment so that they then close again the doors of brotherhood.
- In the name of power? This kind of brotherhood coincides with the so-called temporary political transversality instrumental in reaching determined objectives. This happens when individuals appertaining to different parties join to defend peace or to obtain a determined law, like that against violence to women. In the positive sense, the transversality represents the surpassing of political divisions and ideologies, in the light of reaching good values considered as priorities, such as aiming at a common “universal” goal. It is through the overwhelming power of the secretaries of parties that political debates are unable to have a peaceful confrontation, spoilt by partisan positions, with a tendency to reduce communication to rhetoric and quarrels. The pacifist movements and ecological-ambientalists are examples of transversal gatherings, that

converge on universal requests and overtook their differences. The multiplication of transversality overtakes the ideologies and certain pragmatism prevails. The alliances are able to dissolve and reconstruct new ventures with other followers tackle new problems. The transversality is not in itself beneficial or detrimental. Many times it serves to resolidify an ethical and political inspired majority, which is succumbed in parties. But it would be naïve interpreting it only as a movement of brotherhood, although many times it is only a search for strength to build the power of the group to the detriment of those who are left out. There aren't an infinity of values, but pure opportunistic circulation of the consensus.

- In different groups appertaining to the mafia, transversality represents a 'clique' between entrepreneurs, politicians, university graduates, banks, financial operators, speculators and many of them have interests to defend. At local and national levels, in the work places and in politics, powerful groups solidify, with a vertical internal structure, aimed at gaining power, to gather complicity, alliances, adhesions. A temporary brotherhood like this is more like "a band of rascals".
- In different work places, membership groups are easily created that build an internal genealogy and make it easier for reliable persons to make a career. The criterion of "reliability" is ambiguous and finishes by meaning unconditional adhesion with consolidation group gerarchy at the detriment of competence and ethics of the person's human worth. The criteria of selection of the leading classes is overturned: the result being "reliable", therefore worthy of trust, those who are easily manipulated and the choice of persons of quality is substituted, like Chateaubriand said from the choice of persons who renounce the job to keep their good qualities. Similar informal organization, that are clubs, or "schools" are a wound in the social and political body, that tends to extend and increase the power to infiltrate, reproducing in administrative, financial and judicial environments and in political institutions, substituting the parties

with the logic of pure power, with intrasystematic and current criteria and hide the best part of society.

One can easily see that the idea of brotherhood can be confusing with a membership that divides the world in two, the brothers and the outsiders, the members and the marginalized persons.

In unmasking the false concepts of brotherhood, sociology gives a hand to believers' conviction of being brothers in the name of God, and therefore, sons and daughters of the same Father. Faith is the hidden precious spring in their search, that many times allows a growth in respect, which many lack.

Faith cannot be relegated into a private corner of the conscience and taken out only on Sunday or on the demise of daddy. In sociology, it is the sentinel that keeps guard from false idols presented as the ultimate horizon of knowledge. But it cannot overflow from its place and lay down the law to sociology. In contemporary pluralism of culture it is necessary to adopt a double register. We can consider it as a squint, as with this it is not intended a pathology but a healthy and mature attitude of a person capable of maintaining his bearings in life orientated towards the other, towards the Ideal he intends to reach, towards God. On the other hand, it is necessary to know how to face problems in society even *etui Deus non datetur*, as though God does not exist, because otherwise God can become the stopgap, the preconcepted explanation, the recipe and the sociologists would be right to reproach us because of cutting short problems and resolving them in an artificial way. It is not easy to learn to use the double register in reading your own marital and social personal story: that horizontal, with all the psychological motivations, social, economical and supernatural. As G. Danneels wrote when referring to spouses, all carry with them the lamp of fraternity and human love, like the virgins in the

parable. But it happens that the oil of grace, that makes the lamp burn with divine charity, is capable of loving even when one is not loved oil is scarce in our times, that it is easily contented by solidarity and responsibility. Only wise persons, like the virgins have oil to spare and so are able to light the flow of reciprocal love. The lamp of good will and the oil of divine grace make a mysterious combination, a cocktail that generates true brotherhood: <<One can compare it with the sound of the pianoforte. Two hands are necessary: the left for accompaniment, the right to play the melody. This is the rule. Playing with one hand is possible, but the music played in this way is very poor and incomplete. Likewise for forgiveness, it is played with two hands, that of God and that of man ... we play the accompaniment. God plays the melody. And it is this last that determines the character of the whole piece>><sup>2</sup>. We ask ourselves how it is possible nowadays to practice “Sociology of the supernatural: as Sturzu has done, that in the optic squint which we have spoken about can help us to maintain our compass directed towards God?

#### 4. Some Challenges

I would like to point out some challenges faced in brotherhood so that we can avoid falling into above-mentioned traps and in new products of technological brotherhood.

Regarding confusion between the virtual and the reality of personal relationships: one of the most dangerous aspects of diffusing communication technology is the risk of confusing the direct relationship between persons with that virtual and think that the person can be lit, manipulated, switched off to the other's desire. When we are on the phone, in front of the computer or the TV we can interrupt

<sup>2</sup> G. Danneels, *Pardonnez. Effort de l'homme – don de Dieu* SPA, Mechelen 1998, p. 16.

the relationship with the other if there are any problems easily. In real relationships we cannot treat the other as though he is only there for our enjoyment and conversation. The other worries us, makes us uneasy and involves us in his problems, tires us but is real. The virtual facility is in opposition to the labour of building significant relationships vis-à-vis every day life. We need to learn this difference and not lie down in the comfort of this technological instrument.

We need to avoid excessive realism, representing reality to confirm and approve it, avoiding therefore any judgment that given an ethical orientation to the development of social and cultural processes. We need to avoid excessive idealism, which tends to underestimate and hide reality to build another one to our size, in which we feel at ease, protected and sublime. A new sociology will be credible if it maintains a known equilibrium between spirituality and science.

In the third place, we need to avoid excessive *irenismo* and conflict. This is another tension to maintain alive, because pacifism at all costs is denied by facts. Sociology cannot get out of observing and studying the reasons of interests that orient social behaviour, which are in opposition and that good and bad, involve everyone, from villain to saint. One cannot confuse society inspired by the model of the Trinitarian relationship with the reality that such a model can be reached in time with hard work. The conflict is not demonized but can result in something that can offer precious answers to social problems.

The conviction that fraternity cannot be bought at a discount was conveyed to us. When Chiara Lubich speaks of “Gesù Abbandonato” she does not only express a good intention, a sermon, a spiritual way of life leading to sanctification. It seems to me that it is about a key in relation to the realism we have spoken about: we will deceive ourselves and others if we present a reconciled vision of life and of Christianity. To build fraternity, one must pay a price just like to generate one must give birth. Sociology of love does not speak the truth if by it one

understands it as a simple *embrace us*, a beneficial, peaceful feeling. Thus saying that those who build fraternity pay a price, we place the person together with his liberty and responsibility in the centre. This principle applies to all and is relevant even on a scientific and secular level.

In the fourth place, I would like to pick on the theme of rights, already mentioned by Tiziano Vecchiato. I prefer to connect it with one's obligations and use this word instead of "duties", which give an impression of rigidity. This is a time when rights are being multiplied, of charters of rights reclaimed by every category and reavenged in unilateral pretenses. The rights of a single person or of a category, but, are easily confused with those of others and fraternity becomes closed off. Only when one compares his own requests to the conditions of other people's life come true if it deals with reavenging a privilege. Here because it is the commodity the place of distribution of resources according to the criteria of equality and of corresponding to the exigencies of each person.

One cannot act in "small worlds" (as Tommaso Sorgi called them in his book with the same title<sup>3</sup>), applying to them the criteria of an idyllic community, primary relationships, affectionate, solid and counter imposing to the coldness of some institutions in a dicotomic manner. It can happen in fact when thinking of the community as a clean world with a micro-social solidarity and close, and to the institutions as a corrupt world full of oppression, bureaucracy, with a crystallized macro-society. Based on this one tends to be happy in remaining closed in a ghetto in his own small world. I believe that in this direction it is important to take up the subject of Paul Ricoeur that by the way of management, elaborate an ethic tripod centred on the management of oneself, on the promptness towards the other and on the management of institutions. Even these last mentioned are fragile and need from our part an investment of resources, because they are most

<sup>3</sup> T. SORGI, *Costruire il sociale. La persona e I suoi "piccoli mondi"*, Città Nuova, Roma 1991.

tangible persons who represent criteria of justice in what regards channeling and distribution of resources. It is through the institutions in fact that we do not only love our brothers, but even “everyone” who we will never know, who can never become our friend, but who is equally worthy of our love for him. The institution is that neutral and universal channel which thanks to it we can reach everyone.

In this sociology field I feel it is important on one part to feed the conscience with belonging and a sense of constructive communal fraternity, through the institutions (even scientific academies) try- where it is possible – to put into practice a high quality of sociology and applied social sciences, in a way that all can benefit from the work that they are doing.

Creating fraternity actually means: multiplying through significant channels of amplification of which those institutional, the good that can be done at micro level. It deals with two different levels, although both fundamental, which originate from the same ethical roots.