

## NON-VIOLENCE AS A WAY OF COMBATTING INJUSTICE THE FOUNDATION OF A SOCIETY BASED ON FRATERNITY

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I am a sociologist and I teach “Sociology of Conflicts and Peace Resolution” at the University of Florence. This is a new course leading to a degree in “Peace Operations, Management and Mediation of Conflicts”. Two hundred students are currently registered in this course. I am also National President for IPRI (Italian Peace Research Institute) which forms part of IPRA (International Peace Research Association) which is made up of the main researchers on World Peace. The Italian counterpart has recently merged with the Civil Peace Protection which groups several organisations which act non-violently in conflict situations even abroad, to prevent an outbreak of war, to interrupt the use of arms and find non-violent solutions and to reconcile both sides after a conflict. I do not form part of the Focolare Movement but I have come into contact with Loppiano (Incisa – Val D’Arno, Florence) through friends who are members of *Servas* or “*Open Doors for Peace*”. This is an organisation inspired by Gandhian principles in which hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world offer hospitality for a few days to members from other countries who wish to exchange visits and to get to know people sharing the same interests. *Gandhigra*, a village in the South of India, in Tamilnadu, is also inspired from these ideas of Gandhi, and has a University which is twinned with the University where I teach.

The work done by the Focolare Movement around the world – which we have briefly seen during these days – is marvellous and must certainly be encouraged and extended. It is a work which in the theory of non-violence is defined as the “constructive project” which is one of the two pillars of non-violence. But to attain a brotherly society as referred to in the title of this congress, there is a need of the other pillar of non-violence, which in Gandhi’s terms is defined as *Satyagraha* and which a friend of ours, a priest from Viareggio who died a few years ago, Don Sirio Politi, defined as “*Fight to Love*” (“*Lotta come Amore*”). I do not want to sound critical towards the work done by the Focolare Movement but I define their work as a “non-violent addition”, as Capitini puts it. Capitini used to lecture me and my wife on non-violence, and was first in making Gandhi known in Italy. He spoke of non-violence even during the Fascist period, and ended up in prison for his antifascist ideas.

Why do I deem it essential to bind the non-violent fight against injustice to the constructive project? I do so because the world is full of injustices and abuse. There is an increasingly wealthy North, and the South can only imitate the North and become its accomplice, otherwise it would become increasingly poorer. The same occurs between different social classes, where some become always richer while others grow poorer. War becomes a “normal” tool to defend the privileges of the rich and powerful against the rest. A fraternal society instead needs egalitarian relationships, relationships between equals and not imbalanced relationships like that of master and slave, or rich (even if one practises charity) and poor. At the moment we are immersed in what Bush and his collaborators define as the “never-ending war” against terrorism. The war in Iraq and that which is being prepared against other countries called “rogue states” like Iran, Syria, etc., instead of fighting terrorism is in reality rekindling and reactivating it, so much so that the citizens of rich states are becoming ever more insecure as a result of possible terrorist attacks. For this reason, in my opinion, if we want to lead to “a rejection of war”, which Zani mentioned on the first day of this Congress, we must study and put into practice the second pillar of non-violence, that is *Satyagraha*.

Let us take a better look at this problem. To promote rejection of war, besides talking about the work of the Focolarini which - as we have already seen, may be defined as creating awareness

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and building an alternative society based on fraternal relationships - Zani also speaks of the need for a single international body which substitutes single states, in search of a world without war. This is what the United Nations' preamble states too. At the end of the beautiful writing about the ways of war and peace written by Norberto Bobbio, who has called himself a student of Capitini, three possible forms of pacifism are mentioned: 1) institutional; 2) instrumental; 3) finalistic. Zani speaks of two of the forms of pacifism identified by Bobbio: the finalistic form (whereby peace is achieved by changing the person and making him a pacifist) and the institutional form (giving rise to an organisation which is above national level to resolve conflicts before these get out of control). Bobbio identifies also a third form of pacifism which he defines as instrumental, that is where peace is sought by struggling to reduce the instruments of war, for example, reducing the construction and the selling of arms or demilitarising society. Not only did Zani not speak of this form, but he also criticised pacifism as being inadequate. However, if we take a look at the United Nations Organisation today and evaluate its work, we cannot but see that its preamble is an old record and that the truth is that it is paralysed by a restricted council of security made up of five nations, with the right to veto. These five nations are moreover the biggest manufacturers and traders of arms in the world (of over 85% of heavy arms). How can we hope to arrive at a society, which is not so much fraternal but at least more pacific, when all decisions about the making or unmaking of wars are in the hands of a body controlled by countries which are "arms vendors"? Without a great movement for peace and without strong pressure from below from all populations who have become more conscious about the importance of peace and who work and struggle concretely to reach it, even if we were to have a democratic reform of the UNO, we will not have that body above national level which Zani talks about and there will be even more wars. But Zani is right in criticising the peace movement because very often it is only reactive (it is not an action for peace but a fight against war, and very often it does not fight against all wars but only some chosen ones). Oftentimes the peace movement does not understand the reasoning and methodology of non-violence, which combines the struggle for peace to constructive work to obtain a varied and a more equal society than that of today.

Another aspect, which echoes what has already been said by the environmental expert at this Congress, comes from the Gandhian Movement which identifies three levels of non-violence and peace. Narayan Desai – our Indian friend, son of Gandhi's secretary (who died in the English prisons where he was imprisoned together with Mahatma), brought up by Gandhi himself in the community where he lived with his family, and collaborator of two principal successors of Gandhi, Vinoba and Yahaprakash Narayan – comments that during Hindu prayers, *Shanti* (peace) is repeated three times. He says that the first peace refers to inner peace (if we have no peace inside of us we cannot bring peace to the world); the second peace is that with others of any religion, race, class, nation, etc.; the third peace refers to that with nature around us.

But as has already been referred to earlier, the fundamental problem lies with the fight against injustices: if we remember the prophecy of Isaiah there will not be peace until justice is made. How can one fight against the many injustices which afflict the world without increasing hatred and unfriendliness which are two fundamental elements which impede Man to feel part of the same unity, (to use a term used by Chiara Lubich)? How is it possible to reconcile brotherhood with the non-violent fight against injustices? Gandhi has an answer even for this question: distinguishing between sin and sinner. One needs to love the sinner and to try and convert him and not kill him or look down on him, but one needs to fight using the Satyagraha, that is fight using the force of truth, against his sin.

It is only when one unites the two pillars of non-violence, the "fight to love" of Don Sirio, and the constructive project, like that of the Focolare Movement, that one may hope to obtain a better society, based on egalitarian and brotherly relationships, and in which war is a memory of bygone times.

But before arriving to the conclusion I would like to show you a concrete example about the need for a non-violent fight against injustice taken from the recent seaquake of South East Asia, which took place while my wife and I and our two daughters were in India, one of the countries hit by this terrible tragedy which killed more than 250,000 people. This example came to mind because in the beautiful hotel in which my wife and I are staying these days, there is a prawn meal mentioned in tomorrow's menu. While I was talking to the hotel owner I realised that neither him nor the others who will be eating these prawns know that most of the deaths which occurred were caused by multinational companies which have set up fish farms in the countries hit by the seaquake. To breed these prawns pools are built which are a metre-deep and hundreds of square metres wide. In these pools, seawater and fresh water is pumped. The newborn prawns are put in these pools, they are then fed with chemicals (which probably, will soon – if we think of mad cows – will give us mad prawns which instead of walking backwards will walk forward). In a few months time these prawns will grow and will be sold in the markets of rich countries, even in ours. The profits derived by multinational companies from this type of rearing are extremely high and this explains the rush to find new places where to build these pools. However the damage inflicted on the local population and the environment are even higher. The fresh water needed for everyday life by the local population is no longer fit for drinking due to the fact that saltwater seeps in the terrain. Women who used to work in rice pads, which in these regions usually produce 3 harvests a year, are losing their jobs as they are being substituted by other workers whose job is simply to feed the prawns and collect them when they are ready to be sold; fishermen risk their lives as they may be sucked in by huge pumps which take in seawater to be put in the pools. Besides these notable damages done to the population, even greater damage is done to the environment, damage which has eradicated a natural immunity which the population had before. In order to build these pools, very often forests of mangrove trees were eradicated (the natives call these trees “lifesavers”); they have also removed dunes off the beaches, and even these used to be a protection against the phenomenon of seaquakes. To top it all, after a few years these pools become desert land, and the whole area becomes useless, and cannot even be employed for the continuation of the cultivation of prawns, so that industries have to find another place to destroy. These problems have clearly emerged from studies done about seaquakes, showing that the destruction of mangroves and sand dunes were the main cause of the death of many people, who would have been saved had these not been removed. In fact the tribal populations who lived in the forests were saved thanks to the presence of these trees, even in the Adamane Islands which were at the centre of the seaquake and where the number of victims was high. Currently the owners of these fish farms, who are perhaps not even aware of having contributed to the death of so many people, are asking to be reimbursed for the damage suffered by the seaquake. Some of our Gandhian friends have been protesting non-violently against these industries for years, highlighting the negative effects on the population and the environment. Particularly, women have for many years made non-violent boycotts so that these pools would not be built. An appeal to the Supreme Indian Court has also been made which has admitted that they were right and a decree was issued which impedes the fresh construction of such pools. But often, thanks to the corrupt local authority and the police, this rearing continues to be promoted. So the fight is on everyday. Now these Gandhian friends are asking that instead of giving money to the prawn factories, the local authorities should utilise funds to rebuild the environmental protection which was lost so as to protect the local populations from other possible disasters<sup>1</sup>.

One may think: what was the purpose of these fights if notwithstanding the favourable judgement given by the Supreme Court, these industries are still in operation? I believe that this

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<sup>1</sup> To be able to view this problem in greater depth see three Italian writers: Laura Coppo, *Terra, Gamberi, Contadini ed Eroi*, Editrice Missionaria Italiana, 2002, Bologna (recently translated and published in English and presented by Vandana Shiva, with the title *The Color of Freedom*, Common Courage Press, Monroe, Maine, USA); and the role play for environmental education in schools, of Elena Camino and Laura Colucci, *Gamberetti a Tavola: un problema globale*, EGA, Torino, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2000.

way of thinking is wrong. We must think of how many more people would have died in the seaquake had there been no opposition from the local population, who fought non-violently against these systems, rendering more difficult further construction in these areas. For this reason, in my opinion, the non-violent fight served the purpose of preventing the death of more people. The same goes for war: the non-violent fight may reduce injustices in the world, rendering ineffective the use of arms in fighting against the same injustices. The problem is that if only in a few places and few people are ready to use non-violent fight against injustice, the breeders of industrial prawns and arms producers, when face with this fight will move to other places where people are not ready to fight against them, and thus end up being the winners. So it is necessary that this ability to fight with non-violence is extended to all parts of the world. This calls for a big commitment and a big effort.

To conclude: your foundress Chiara Lubich speaks of her movement as a “revolution of love”. Yesterday an Italian translation of a book written by my favourite author was launched, whom I consider to be one of my teachers: P. Sorokin, *The Power of Love*, Citta Nuova, Rome, 2005, which highlights the fact that the power of love is the greatest power of all. Our Gandhian friends speak of the need of “a complete revolution”: a revolution of the heart, the mind, of social relationships, of culture, of economy, and of social structure. I believe that a revolution of love is fundamental for this complete revolution, and it precedes it. However it cannot be limited to interpersonal relationships between human beings, but it should be extended to all other aspects.

There are four commitments which, according to the Gandhians, form part of this complete revolution:

- 1) creating awareness in people (and here we remember the lesson of Freire, the greatest South American pedagogue);
- 2) the organisation of the population, above all of the poorest and those who are marginalised, who suffer the major part of injustice, often passively and without reacting;
- 3) the non-violent fight against injustice, that which Don Sirio calls the “fight to love”, because it fights injustice and frees not only the person who is its victim, but also those who perpetuate it, often without knowing;
- 4) a constructive project and an alternative project which is directed towards a more just and fraternal society, like the one the Gandhians and the Focolare Movement are trying to create.

If the Focolarini accept this non-violent “addition”, over and above the constructive project which they already promote in a very valid way, they will prepare themselves and also educate others to use the non-violent fight against injustice. This road could lead towards a society based upon fraternity, a more just society, one without war. Even if the road is long and difficult, it could be faster and can lead to success.