

The religions of the book by Franco Ferrarotti

This issue of AIB Studi you are about to read and that deals with topics particularly dear to the magazine - the role of book infrastructures, learning as a common good, the transformations of the information ecosystem and therefore the role of professionals - is dedicated to Prof. Franco Ferrarotti, born in Palazzolo Verellese on April 7th, 1926 and passed away in Rome last November 13th, at almost 98 years old.

Father of Italian sociology - he was entrusted in 1961 with the first chair in Italy at the Sapienza University of Rome - he restored dignity and prestige to a discipline that before him had been poorly considered thanks to an uncommon ability of thinking and visionary innovation, and also to the intertwining of this attitude with civil commitment.

Ferrarotti's is a qualitative sociology that could not be detached from reality: it had to 'work' to be a tool for understanding and transforming society. Ferrarotti's sociology is radical - as 'going to the root of things' - it is critical, vibrant and contaminated by constant dialogue with other disciplines: from philosophy to anthropology, from history to psychology. The Professor firmly believed that sociological research should be immersed in reality with the aim of addressing people's concrete problems. His studies on urban marginality, on Rome are an example of this. Hence also his attention to social service.

General Sociology was my first exam at university and - after so many years I recognize - reading his books was an imprinting. In my personal view, librarianship should also live by the same tension expressed by the Professor: a vibrant discipline capable of guiding libraries, strongly enhancing their instrumental role in human development, between civic engagement and social action.

Regarding his civil commitment, it is no coincidence that between 1958 and 1963, as a member of the Chamber of Deputies, he supported innovative bills and tried to bring sociology closer to political issues, for example by highly valorising the figure of the social worker, an expression he preferred to 'social assistant'. He was very keen to remember this commitment of his.

He told me about it several times in the numerous conversations we had in his Roman studio in Viale Trieste from 2020 until a few weeks before his death, during a course of studies and research, very intense for me, on the extraordinary figure of Adriano Olivetti, in which I had the privilege of having the Professor at my side and which led to the publication of my *Il problema del tempo umano. Le biblioteche di Adriano Olivetti: storia di una idea rivoluzionaria* (Edizioni di Comunità, 2024). The preface by Prof. Ferrarotti was a gift.

The mountains of books that literally cover every corner of his studio, his incredible library of books, read and written, testify to his faith in the book object and also to his concerns for a purely 'accounting' conception of life in which technological innovation often plays a conflicting role with the idea of culture as a life project, unable to guarantee respect for the human and community balance indispensable conditions (the latest essays published by Solfanelli bear witness to this, I'm thinking, for example, of *La comunità nucleo vivo del sociale; La socialità fredda; Un popolo di frenetici informatissimi idioti*).

This too connected him with Adriano Olivetti of whom he had been more than a collaborator, a confidant and a friend, as with Cesare Pavese. On a daily basis, from 1948 until 1960, the year of Adriano's death, he shared with Olivetti reflections and visions of the future and with him he had been a candidate in the Movimento di Comunità political elections of 1958, taking over the following year from Olivetti himself, who had obtained a seat in the Chamber and had resigned in the meantime.

I don't think it's possible for me to transfer the sense of deep gratitude I feel into the writing of this or any other text for the intensity of our conversations, for the inspiration every dialogue with him has given me, for the blind faith towards the book and the reading he has transmitted to me at all times and have strengthened my own. He wrote memorable pages on this. I invite you to read for example *Leggere, leggersi* published by Donzelli in 1998 and in the same year *Libri, lettori, società* published by Liguori.

In 2021 he gave this magazine an editorial entitled *Le religioni del libro di Adriano Olivetti*¹. The religion of the book was also his and for this reason, in our conversations, when we talked about the widespread dissemination of the book that libraries could guarantee, I saw a flash lighting up in his eyes. He recalled that this was precisely the intimate and deep meaning of the experience with the Olivetti community centres that had been designed with the library as the conceptual core to encourage everyone's conscious and responsible participation, men and women, in the social process and community development. Especially of the youngest.

A few days ago, Minister Giuli announced the Piano Olivetti dedicated to supporting reading and libraries with the allocation of 30 million euros in favour of the acquisition of books for Italian public libraries. The Plan stresses the importance of investing in libraries to combat isolation, especially among young people and in less central areas, reaffirming the government's commitment to address resources to «re-educate ourselves to the pleasure of shared intelligence and culture as sociality». Who knows what the Professor would have thought.

Personally, hearing this news made me feel very emotional, themes that are very dear to me resonate, and I remembered immediately a quote by Franco Ferrarotti read in who knows which of his writings, brought up in our conversations several times and inserted in the epigraph to my book as an omen:

«Ideas, thought freely all the way and lived with coherence, walk slowly, but do walk, and can still help to build patiently a new history from below».

Chiara Faggiolani

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¹ Franco Ferrarotti, *Le religioni del libro di Adriano Olivetti*, «AIB studi», 60 (2020), n. 3, DOI: 10.2426/aibstudi-12899.