

**Presentation of the Book, “The Power of Love”,
written by Pitirim Sorokin - Part II**

*Tommaso Sorgi**

Many years ago, when I was still lecturing at the University of Teramo, I tried to convince the directors of Publishing Houses to translate this work of the Russian sociologist Sorokin. I had an abridged version of the book, an English edition of 1967, and I could see how well this book suited my intention of offering sociology as a humanistic science, one full of warmth, useful or rather necessary, to young people.

It was my duty as a professor to supply my students with instruments for “inclusive” analysis - as suggested by the Weberian *Verstehende Soziologie* - because I felt that this could help them not to lose track when faced with the conditions of social structure and with so many incentives to abandon institutions. My status, my role and my conscience made me feel that it was my duty to be at their side so that they could discover the positive aspects of social living and so that they could cultivate their personal energies. Both could be used fruitfully to achieve maturity and to be fully aware of their ability to contribute towards the *Construction of Society*, by reinvigorating it, where necessary, and by renewing it.¹ I thought that the precious words of the layman Sorokin could serve such a purpose, since he spoke about creative love, about true values and realities of whole historical periods², about the *supra-conscious*, which is the highest level in the structure of personality³ and the divine aspect of man, the manifestation of Divinity.⁴ All these elements, especially the last one, gave me the opportunity to speak on a spiritual level when dealing with this ‘positive’ science.

I was then confronted with the fact that this book spoke of Jesus only from the human aspect. I was made to notice that this ‘was not a theological treaty’ and I was sad to see that the editors were legitimately upset.

Yet, the directors of the publishing house *Citta’ Nuova* translated two reviews of the sociological thought of the same author. One was written in 1928⁵ and the other in 1966⁶. The translation was published in two volumes in 1974, and it was given the title “*History of Sociological Theories*”. I still feel very grateful that *Citta’ Nuova* gave the opportunity to give my share towards the introduction to these two volumes, even though this meant a lot of research. I felt I had to know more about this sociologist and I drafted 44 pages entitled: “*The Integral Sociology of P.A. Sorokin*”⁷.

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Times changed and they have changed drastically, and the proposal to publish Sorokin was this time presented with greater authority. I have tried my best to do all that is possible to support this idea, and I intervened when I got to know that there were queries about the title that had to be given to the Italian translation. I think that the title as it is now - *The Power of Love* - presents itself well and it brings to mind another book that has a very similar title: "*The Art of Loving*",⁸ written by Eric Fromm, even though the reading of the text may not be so easy.

I must confess that the book we are presenting here brings to mind some religious problems. Somewhere else, Sorokin describes himself in this way: "Politically I am a wild donkey; I am a conservative Christian anarchist". After a childhood of illiteracy, he was educated at a college of the Orthodox Church; but evidently he was influenced by Leo Tolstoy and by his non-violent, civil and religious "anarchism"⁹.

In this book, Christ is presented as any other founder of the great religions. He is like Buddha, Confucius and Lao-Tse. These names, together with those of Francis of Assisi, Damian of the Lepers and other Catholic and Orthodox saints, Gandhi and some Muslim mystics, seem to carry a certain weight in the *Index of names*, while Jesus Christ does not appear at all on the list. But one can find his name in the index of the present edition of *Citta' Nuova*, a translated revised edition of 1982, prepared by relatives of Sorokin (maybe by his two sons).

I cannot say why in the version published during his lifetime Jesus' name did not appear on the list of names.

My theory is that this ends up being a sign - maybe an unconscious one - of the very particular consideration that Sorokin has of Jesus. It is enough to consider the fact that he opens his introduction by quoting three of the eight beatitudes found in the Gospel of St. Matthew. He quotes the ones about the humble of heart, the merciful and the peacemakers¹⁰. Very often, he refers to the Sermon on the Mount to incite its application not only in the life of individuals but also where civil institutions are concerned, because he sees in it a solution for today's crisis¹¹. Throughout the book we find that he uses quotations from the Gospels; he gives special attention to the Passion of Christ, referring especially to Christ's agony in the garden of Getsemani and to His cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹².

I believe that deep down at heart, Sorokin had a special love for Jesus.

This sociologist is very dear to me, also because I have found great resemblance between his sociology of love and the thought and action of the Focolare Movement of which I form part. I intend to focus my attention on three points to support this.

First point: In his last chapter, Sorokin launches an appeal, saying that: “Universal love (...) should replace tribal selfishness”. This sounds very much like the invitation for universal brotherhood launched by Chiara Lubich, who tirelessly delivers this message to people of different religions, of different nations and to local and world politicians. Does Sorokin speak explicitly of “brotherhood”? The term “brotherhood” is not found in the English abridged edition which I have. There are 15 chapters in it and besides the *Index of names* it contains also an *Index of subjects*. I went through the actual translation of the text and I have found that Sorokin speaks of brotherhood when he mentions the traditional monastic communities (chapter 21) and when he writes about some typical Society of Brothers of his time in USA (chapter 22).

I read chapter 23 very thoroughly. This is the conclusive chapter on universal love and finally I have come across the following:

- page 650: “ (...) if each one of us behaves as a brother who loves everyone, or as a sister who really cares, it is only then that altruistic love will be extended to the whole of humanity”.

- page 654: “Within the span of one or two generations, this phase will lead humanity to be much closer to the ideal of safety, brotherhood and peace on earth. More would be achieved than what patriotic tribal leaders and their followers have succeeded to do in thousands of years, and more than whatever they can succeed to do in the future”.

- page 660: “(...) such a change would mean great progress in the extension of love to all humanity; it would lead to being one united family, finally free from tribal conflicts and human clashes”.

Second point: When the sociologist mentions the seven aspects of love in the first chapter, he includes its physical aspect. He speaks of it as unity and integration between the forces of the “organic world” found in the atom as well as in the whole universe¹³. This unity reminds us of Chiara Lubich’s writing about her concept of “all things being in love with each other. So if the stream ends in the lake, this is the outcome of love”. Speaking of the organic world, she continues to say: “If a pine tree grows next to another pine tree, this is the outcome of love”¹⁴.

Third point: In most of his talks, Igino Giordani used to say: “Humanity needs *vitamin A* (A standing for Amore - Love)”. This is not so different from what Sorokin expresses in this book when he speaks of *vitamin L* (L stands for Love). He says: “To love and to be loved is the most important *vitamin*, one we cannot do without for our own healthy personal growth and for a happy human life”¹⁵. But the perspective of these two varies, because while Sorokin focuses on the life of the individual and speaks also of the effects on physical health and longevity¹⁶, Giordani thinks of the whole human race and its history. He also adds that: “love is the vitamin for sanctity”¹⁷.

Both Sorokin and Giordani support the same idea with almost identical words: “the world perishes because of lack of love”. Giordani confirms this in more than one of his

books¹⁸. Sorokin states it in a report about an activity carried out by the *Harvard Research Centre on altruistic love*. In this report he entrusts the *reconstruction of humanity*¹⁹ to social scientists, claiming that they should be “the gardeners of this marvellous flower”, namely of love - *vivos voco* (he writes this in Latin)²⁰.

At this point we should ask: are sociologists the ones to rebuild a new humanity? This is the task of all human thought. We believers know that this is not enough. We also need the help of “Our Father who is in heaven” and who walks on earth with His children.

Some years back I expressed my reflections about this in two publications of mine²¹. Now I intend to give the gist of them, with some slight changes.

I am not the only one to believe that the revaluation of some classic philosophy and of certain old and recent religious concepts may be beneficial towards generating a new generation, a new humanity. I refer particularly to the Christian concept of ‘person’ and of ‘new human being’. I refer also to Christian universality. While placing itself at the origin of modern internationalism, Christian universality considers all human beings as members of one human family, all gifted with identical humanity regardless of the differences that do not in any way change the substance. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female”²², wrote Paul of Tarsus. In the history of thought, he was one who strongly believed in the renewal of “I”²³ and in the radical unity of all humanity. He contributed towards both.

While proposing such reflections, sociology does not intend to replace philosophy and theology. I do not think one can support the generous intention of some, who like Bouthoul and Duvignaud, want to see in sociology “the image of contemporary humanism (...) the key and the centre of modern humanism”²⁴.

Each science, like each human being, must possess a sense of the limits of its own field. It is the philosopher who formulates ideals for man, as long as he does not abdicate and give in to “weak thinking”. It is the work of religion to announce and give testimony. Every now and then in history, we come across social reformers who do not fit in any specific academic category, as for example Gandhi. Reformers may be politicians, economists, writers, artists, humanitarians of various tendencies, who manage to mark the era in which they live. Persons who cause some sort of cultural movement can also be reformers. For example, to-day there are certain singers, who manage to influence masses of young people and there are those, who manage to promote morbid violence by the use of the screens. Some of these daily pictures contribute not only towards the denial of values but also towards reversing them completely (and love takes different meanings). The result is that we have the *homo televisivus*, emptied of interior spaces and of strong principles that regard his personal, family and social life.

At this point the sociologist has even more right to consider himself as a master of life. His teaching, however, contains in itself a fundamental problem: being a sociologist, he starts by taking into consideration the norms and customs that prevail and that are empirically noticed by him (social values), and then he elevates them to general ethical principles (moral values) and uses them to judge very delicate problems that may deal, for example, with life, death and the very nature of man.

When the sociologist does this, he may not have any “general concept of the world” (that which is known as *Weltanschauung*) as part of his cultural background; and this becomes a risk for himself and for others, and becomes dangerous. On the other hand, the sociologist may have “a concept of the world” that is more or less precise, and this will become the source and the soul of his “teaching”. In both cases, sociology itself is not the *magistra vitae*.

Very often the sociologist tends to trespass his limits: besides being enchanted by observation, explanation, classification, he is also attracted by the charm of “thought”. Scientific loyalty combined with intellectual honesty make him feel bound to declare very serenely “the ultimate values” that become his aspiration.

Gianfranco Morra rightly claims that the sociologist “cannot be obliged to be only a sociologist”, but he also reminds the sociologist that he is not allowed “confusion where methods and fields of research” are concerned²⁵.

Sorokin tries to avoid “confusion”: in his “integral” method he includes and evaluates the empirical level. But his being a sociologist is enriched by his psychological, almost philosophical and religious interests, and he persists in carrying out theoretical research and practice and accumulates information to support these same interests.

Even Gason Bouthol tries to avoid “confusion”: while he reconfirms that “sociology is at the centre of modern humanism”, he admits that in this way one remains in the sphere of a “positive science”, and he suggests that one should promote a new social science: *metasociology*. He even shows the need “to widen our horizon” by resorting to “metaphysical thought”²⁶.

We have to be sincere and say that the “metasociological” sciences already exist, but one has to look for further opportunities to make them become “a scientific community” for their own interest, or better still, for the good of their only subject: the whole human being. One should not disdain to do this even where sociology is concerned.

To remain within the parameters of this social science, we must accept with simplicity and humility the idea of Durkheim and adapt it. It “does not propose the construction of an ideal”; it only tries to “analyse it and explain it (...) and to look for the conditions

necessary to help man - if possible – regulate the functioning of it”²⁷. It can be clearly stated that sociology tries to help men fulfill the ideal in the complex situation of social life. But it is aware of the fact that men need to inculturate themselves, and this means incarnating a universal idea in the different specific cultures and individuals, that are ‘situated’ in a precise social-cultural context. (This can therefore be useful even in theology, in pastoral work, in confession).

Let us go back to the *vivos voco* used by Sorokin to address social scientists. “The living do not rest”, says Morra, referring to American social scientists. He explains their deafness by claiming that they are “over-integrated in the system and dogmatic to the point of intolerance”, so he questions the principle of neutrality of their science.²⁸

We have a thousand motives to consider ourselves “alive”. And now, as expressed lately, we have to function as “a network”, or as one used to say before, we have to function as a “body”. First of all, we sociologists or apprentice sociologists have to be a body. And this can give birth to the big and whole scientific community based on a common thought. Here we can join forces and let our commitment as sociologists be “alive”. While being humble enough to admit that the task is by far superior to our abilities and our science, we have to understand that through our theoretical research, our practice, our thought and behaviour guided by our horizons and fulfilled with the same seriousness and love of the author of this book, we can offer a partial, but necessary and precious contribution to today’s humanity.

NOTE SORGI

1. Refer to *Costruire il sociale*, Città Nuova, Roma 1991, 3° ed. 1998, cap.2°, (*L'unità del corpo sociale*) and 3° (*I "piccoli mondi"*), pp. 58-128.
 2. With the help of many other researchers P.A. Sorokin analysed the fluctuation of such values during almost three thousand years of history and published the result in 4 volumes: *Social and cultural dynamics*, New York 1937-1941.
 3. In *Id.*, *The Ways and power of love*, Boston 1954, It. tr. *Il potere dell'amore*, Città Nuova, Roma 2005; see *La struttura della personalità creativa*, chapters 5 and 6, pp.149-189.
 4. *Ibid.*, p.167.
 5. *Id.*, *Contemporary sociological theories*, New York 1928.
 6. *Id.*, *Sociological theories of today*, New York, London e Tokyo, 1966.
 7. T. Sorgi, *La sociologia integrale di P.A.Sorokin*, Introduction to P.A. Sorokin, *Storia delle teorie sociologiche*, Città Nuova, Roma 1974, vol.1°, pp. VI-XLIX.
 8. E. Fromm, *L'arte di amare*, New York 1956, tr. it., Mondadori, Milano 1975.
 9. In his book *The Ways and power of love* pp.230-231, Sorokin praises the Russian novelist for his admiration of the *Sermon on the mount* and the law of love that Christ preached; and he gives quotations of Tolstoj (who was excommunicated in 1901 by the Holy Synod). Among other things, Tolstoj wrote: “Jesus founded no church, he created no state... he imposed no external authority, but he simply
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- committed himself to write the law of God in the hearts of men so that they could govern themselves”, as they say (and live): “My God, take me wherever You decide”. (L. Tolstoj, *The law of love and the law of violence*, 1910, tr. English New York 1948). Tolstoj is considered to be utopian in his views in that he wanted law to be abolished and suggested that love should be attributed the task that juridical laws failed to accomplish effectively: v. G. Fassò, *Storia della filosofia del diritto*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1970, vol.3°, pp.185-188.
10. P.A. Sorokin, *Il potere dell'amore* cit., p.35.
 11. *Ibid.*, pp.55, 89, 178, 186, 220, 272 and so on; in other publications he also proclaims how necessary it is to apply the love expressed in the *Sermon on the mount* in “personal behaviour, in inter-individual relationships and in groups, in social institutions and in culture”: Id., *La mia filosofia è l'integralismo*, W Burnett, *Questa è la mia filosofia*, New York 1957, It. tr. Bompiani, Milano 1961, pp.243-257, spec.255-257.
 12. Id., *Il potere dell'amore* cit., p.73.
 13. *Ibid.*, p.49; refers to V.S. Soloviev (and others).
 14. Cit. in G. Rossè, *La creazione*, “Nuova Umanità”, XXIII (2001/6) n. 138, p. 830. Even Sorokin speaks about the organic world in his book *Il potere dell'amore* where he examines “*the biological aspect of love*” (*ibid.*, pp.49-50) and then he passes on to the *psychological aspect* and finally to the *social aspect*.
 15. *Ibid.*, pp.128-129.
 16. *Ibid.*, *L'amore, importante fattore di vitalità e longevità e Potere curativo dell'amore*, pp.121-127.
 17. I. Giordani, *Laicato e sacerdozio*, Città Nuova, Roma 1964, p.268-269 ; see also Id., *Le due città*, Città Nuova, Roma 1961, p.163.
 18. Id., *Le due città*, cit., p.493; he uses the term “penury”.
 19. P.A. Sorokin, *The reconstruction of humanity*, Boston 1948; with this book which he wrote immediately after *Society, culture and personality*, New York 1947, Sorokin started to accentuate his commitment to study altruistic love.
 20. Id., *Les travaux du centre de recherche de Harvard sur l'altruisme créateur*, in “Cahiers int. de sociologie” 1955, vol. XIX, p.103; this appeal concludes the text given in French (pp.92-103), but it is not present in the original English text *Studies of the Harvard center in creative altruisme*, 1955 inserted in Id., *A long Journey: an autobiography*, New Haven 1963.
 21. T. Sorgi, *Costruire il sociale*, cit., pp.170-172 and *Sorokin and the sociology of love* “Sociologia”, a. XXIV, 1990, n.2-3, Roma, pp.9-24, spec. 23-24.
 22. *Gal* 3, 28.
 23. “Though our outward man is corrupted, yet our inward man is renewed day by day” (*2 Cor*, 4,16); “put off the old man... who is corrupted according to the desire of error, ... and put on the new man, who according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth” (*Ef* 4, 22 e 24): “I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me” (*Gal* 2, 20); see also *Col* 3, 10; *Fil* 1, 21; *Rom* 13, 14.
 24. G. Bouthoul, *Trattato di sociologia*, Paris 1949, It. tr. Città Nuova, Roma 1974, vol.1°, pp.22 e 41; ref. also to J. Duvignaud, *Introduction à la sociologie*, Paris 1966, pp.149-173.

25. G. Morra, *Introduzione alla sociologia del sapere*, La Scuola, Brescia 1990, p.136.
26. G. Bouthoul, op. cit., pp.41-44.
27. E. Durkheim, *Giudizi di valore e giudizi di realtà*, in “Revue de métaphysique et de morale” 1911, vol.XIX, tr. it., in Id., *Le regole del metodo sociologico. Sociologia e filosofia*, Parigi 1895 e 1924, It. tr. Ed. di Comunità, Milano 1963, p.220.
28. G. Morra, *Sociologia della conoscenza*, Città Nuova, Roma 1975, pp.41-42.