

## A new “place” for sociology\*

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Together with the organisers of this Congress we had already dreamt of moments like these many years ago. This is, therefore, a moment of great joy.

At the end of this meeting I cannot add many more things as a sociologist since much has already been said. However, given my past experience, especially while working in Brazil amongst ecclesiastic communities, with workers’ unions and as a lecturer at different universities, I feel that I am living the dawn of a new period.

I cannot forget, however, that one of my worries and of our nation is the lack of answers, always promised by governing authorities, but which have not been given yet; another worry is that certain things still need to be put in their right place. An example is the environmental issue, which does not only arise due to lack of technology. The United States, for example, have all the necessary technology but the Colorado River is still in the condition we all know. The problem of my country is poverty rather than lack of technology.

When we meet on occasions like this, we can see that, apart from the contradictions brought by the colonisation process, apart from the many sufferings, many good things have emerged from Europe. And here, in this meeting, we also experience the joy of being able to share the fantastic achievements of Europe.

In the light of this I would like to say a few words as a sociologist: I believe that what we are doing here is putting sociology at great risk. We have started an experience regarding which sociology has the responsibility of offering an explanation. That is, we have started an experience where love creates an objective reality which sociology must explain. I think that this is our first challenge: to explain love, to explain the presence of Jesus in our midst, to explain fraternity as a concrete object, as a sociological object, especially in respect of the results it brings about.

Another challenge is that of explaining the possibility of a new epistemological experience, considering what Chiara Lubich says. I will explain myself better: Chiara Lubich offers us a “place” from where to look at the world: no longer in view of social classes, neither in view of individuals about whom sociologists have to think and make mathematical calculations, statistics, social physics, etc. She offers us a different “place” which is no longer that of science in the way we have understood it until now, but of science as is perhaps seen by poets rather than sociologists. I remember T.S. Eliot who had wisdom, which we have today lost due to knowledge; he had knowledge which we have lost due to information. Therefore, I think that Chiara is taking us back to a “place”, to a real “epistemological place”, which is looking at all things from the eyes of Wisdom, of Jesus in our midst<sup>1</sup>. This is, therefore, our second challenge: to find a way, to say, to show that Jesus in our midst is a “place” that can create a new understanding, a new knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

And finally, a thought, an intuition that I think is something which goes beyond any sociological contribution: we are not in front of a science, a philosophy, a social science, but in front of a new knowledge ... *Claritas*<sup>2</sup>, maybe.

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\* Written draft is from a taped presentation; not edited by the author.

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<sup>1</sup> “Jesus in our midst” means the presence of Jesus amongst those who are united in His name (see *Mt* 18,20). In the spirituality of the focolare this is an experienced reality which is reflected upon which has an effect on life and on the way of thinking. (*Editor’s note*)

<sup>2</sup> The word *Claritas* is used to denote light that comes from on High – from the Holy Spirit – and that sheds light on all human realities and knowledge.