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LUIGI ROMANINI AND *IL MOVIMENTO PEDAGOGICO ALL'ESTERO*  
(1947-1951)

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*Luigi Romanini (1892-1964) was a teacher, a school director, an inspector and was involved in national school administration, in professional associations and in teacher training. In such a role he wrote books and articles to present The modern methods (title of one of his monographic works, 1950). He dedicated many pages to the main school innovators of the XIX<sup>th</sup>, and above all the XX<sup>th</sup> century, classified by theoretical issues, chronological criteria and geographical areas. His interest in activity schools stemmed and took shape between Fascism – he defined himself as an interpreter of Gentile's reform in experimenting interest groups at school – and the early Republican Italy. He introduced educational sources, in some cases not well known in Italy, playing a role of a mediator between professional communities of teachers, educational research and specialized publishing. Il movimento pedagogico all'estero was published between 1947 (vol. 1, Le idee) and 1951 (vol. 2, Le esperienze); it is also a relevant text about international opening and modernization of catholic pedagogy in Italy in the afterwar.*

Luigi Romanini (1892-1964) era un insegnante, un dirigente scolastico, un ispettore ed operava nell'amministrazione scolastica nazionale, nelle associazioni professionali e nella formazione degli insegnanti. Muovendo da queste esperienze ha scritto libri e articoli per presentare *I metodi moderni* (titolo di una delle sue opere monografiche, 1950). Ha dedicato molte pagine ai principali innovatori della scuola del XIX e, soprattutto, del XX secolo, classificati per questioni teoriche, criteri cronologici e aree geografiche. Il suo interesse per le scuole attive è nato e ha preso forma tra il fascismo – si definì interprete della riforma di Gentile nello sperimentare gruppi di interesse a scuola – e l'Italia repubblicana. Ha introdotto fonti educative, in alcuni casi non molto conosciute in Italia, svolgendo un ruolo di mediatore tra “comunità professionale degli insegnanti”, ricerca educativa e editoria specializzata. *Il movimento pedagogico all'estero* è stato pubblicato tra il 1947 (volume 1, *Le idee*) e il 1951 (volume 2, *Le esperienze*); è anche un testo rilevante sull'apertura internazionale e la modernizzazione della pedagogia cattolica in Italia nel dopoguerra.

*Key words: new education; activity schools; international education movement, catholic pedagogy; pedagogic naturalism; new education reception in Italy.*

Parole chiave: educazione nuova; scuola attiva; movimento pedagogico internazionale; pedagogia cattolica; naturalismo pedagogico; ricezione dell'attivismo in Italia.

*An international overview of new education*

Luigi Romanini's *Il movimento pedagogico all'estero* [The Pedagogic Movement Abroad] was published between 1947 (volume 1, *Le idee*) and 1951 (volume 2, *Le*



*esperienze*) by La Scuola, Brescia. As a scholar, Romanini was not engaged *stricto sensu* in comparative educational research; we can see him as an attentive reader and observer of the international pedagogical panorama, capable of contributing to the professional preparation of teachers, drawing on a wide range of foreign literature, not well known in Italy.

His interest in modern methods – in the same years he wrote another book, *I metodi moderni*, a monographic contribution to the *Biblioteca dell'educatore* directed by Luigi Volpicelli (1950) – it is the characteristic feature of his production, with continuity, before and after the Second World War.

His point of view is attentive to practices but he also wants to place them in a theoretical background, a suitable framework for teachers' intellectual reflection. He invites the reader to grasp similarities and differences between various approaches, authors, cultural environments, experiences, bearing in mind the work carried out in classrooms.

On the one hand, he seems to recognize the need for teachers to be active around the attraction of evocative ideas and around the example of prestigious founders in order to cultivate, according to Castoriadis' formula, their *foyer mythologique* (Meirieu 2018). On the other hand, although he remains anything but indifferent to the fascination of such authors, he uses the comparative lever to distance himself.

*Concordia discors* is the formula keeping the framework together: methodological and didactic solutions, conceived by education innovators, converge despite the divergent theoretical premises from which they spread out, and Romanini moves on this crowded scenario following the auspices of a possible synthesis. He thus seeks a fair distance, taking into account the delicate balance between theoretical statements and operational assumptions that distinguish this kind of professional literature. He keeps away from the conflicting implications hiding under the ashes and describes the practices while unravelling the skein of theoretical filiations to shed light on them. His ideal reader is interested in measuring the suggestions of the “new methods” with his own experience; the text's answer is a bridge between what happens in the classroom and a set of philosophical classification schemes.

He is a school man – teacher, director, inspector – involved in the environments where a teaching culture is developed, with its own physiognomy, language and channels of intellectual animation: such a point of view makes his compilation work original. The contexts in which Luigi Romanini expresses his mature interest in international pedagogy are school administration, teacher associations, and the main development hubs of Catholic pedagogical thought in Italy. Among the journals, especially «*Scuola italiana moderna*», in which some contributions on authors and trends are published before converging into *Il movimento pedagogico all'estero*.

### *School administration and intellectual militancy*

Romanini was born in 1892 in Sampierdarena (Genoa). He studied in Brescia at Cesare Arici college, an institution supported by the Catholic bourgeoisie in which,

among others, the brothers Giovanni Battista – the future pope – and Ludovico Montini would have studied almost in the same years. He began teaching in Turin and then in Piacenza; he was involved in Catholic teachers association Niccolò Tommaseo, with responsibility charges, and in the *Gruppo d'azione per le scuole del popolo* [Action group for people schools] led by Angelo Colombo (Lombardi 2013). In 1925-26 he was primary school director in Legnano, and in 1928-29 in Varese. Since 1935 he was inspector of the district of Pavia, where he settled. In 1947 he was transferred to Novara and in 1949 to Milan, where he worked until his retirement (1959).

In the Twenties he experimented the centres of interest. It is difficult to say which his sources were at the time; one was probably Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, who gave him a positive feedback and who had contributed to introducing this formula into the Italian context, which was widely and extensively used – beyond Decroly – like many others in the panorama of new education.

Romanini wrote that his experiment was a «direct emanation of Gentile reform». It is worth going into detail here, to grasp an interesting trait of his approach to “novelty” of the active methods. His occasional contact with Giovanni Gentile dates back to a didactic exhibition on Fascism that he had curated in Varese (Romanini 1929). At the end of 1929 he wrote a letter to him of which we do not know the follow up<sup>1</sup>. He was impressed by having read in translation in «La nuova scuola italiana», pedagogical review founded by Ernesto Codignola, an article by A. Guevara called *Il metodo dei centri d'interesse*. Too hastily, he thought, the article praised yet another novelty coming from abroad. He himself had led such an experience through his various destinations in Legnano, Varese and Saronno where he had had a two-year interim, and in Pinerolo too, where the school director was his brother Angelo, engaged in an almost parallel career as a school inspector (another brother, Giuseppe, was a teacher too).

He did not believe – so he shielded himself – he was the creator of who knows what innovation; he was more inclined to claim that centres of interest belonged to Gentile's School Reform «understood and applied in depth»; hence the request to the Sicilian philosopher – and to Codignola, to whom he had addressed the day before – for a space in a «pedagogical culture review». He wanted to underline the Italian original application of such ideas, their Gentilian sonship, their full representativeness of a reforming effort in which he felt committed and involved.

The school-man's zeal-filled letter is a very recurrent genre in the archives of intellectuals who in the early twentieth century invested in teaching knowledge, and this epistolary fragment is too sporadic, the correspondence too asymmetrical and occasional to offer exhaustive information on the less than forty-year-old school director's psychological attitude.

The most productive inferences we can draw do not concern Romanini's position during the regime, which may nevertheless constitute a relevant precedent for a book dated 1947-1951. What is interesting, on the other hand, is the way in which, between

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Romanini, Letter to *Eccellenza* [Giovanni Gentile], Varese, 27.11.1929, in Fondazione Giovanni Gentile, Roma, Fondo Gentile, serie 1 *Corrispondenza*, U.A. 4902 *Romanini L.*, busta 109.

Fascism and the afterwar, he was involved in a phase of organizational growth and cultural elaboration both of the school of which he was an official and of the environments in which he spent his intellectual militancy. His investment is common to many other teachers projected in the improvement of teaching, looking for places of resonance for their experiences and reflections, able to seize opportunities for job growth during a cycle of professional community development. The reception of new education is one of the most relevant aspects of such modernization of pedagogical knowledge in Italy and in Catholic culture (Chiosso 2003).

The new education movement offered many occasions for teachers to recognize themselves, rightly or wrongly, in the various experiences of its leaders, debating on a not yet crystallized lexicon and looking for national ways or, in any case, for pertinent adaptations to their own religious or cultural context. With his ambitious compendium Romanini would have responded to a need to put order and to canalise, through a systematic study, teachers' efforts. The horizon of his commitment is intertwined with political, cultural and religious variables, typical of Italian history of that period, which conditioned, solicited and revitalized pedagogical studies.

Romanini, like many others, had foreseen in the regime a possible convergence between a political modernity and a pedagogical one, between an expansive cycle of schooling and the related demand for an original theoretical and practical elaboration (Charnitzky 1996). In such a key one can read the two publications of 1935, both for the specialized publisher Paravia: *Scuola littoria. Fondamento dottrinale-corporativo della educazione fascista* [Lictorial School. Doctrinal-corporative foundation of Fascist Education] and *I principi del fascismo nel campo dell'educazione* [The Principles of Fascism in Education], which in the 1939 edition will include in appendix *La Carta della scuola e la relazione al Duce di S. E. Bottai* [The Charter of School and His Excellency Bottai's Report to the Dux], the main document of the last (and the most original, though unfulfilled) fascist educational reform.

In the same year the Catholic publisher La Scuola printed *I principi affermati ed attuati dal fascismo nel campo dell'educazione* [The Affirmed and Implemented Principles by Fascism in the field of Education] by Marco Agosti; the year before, the National Fascist Institute of Culture had published *Scuola e politica* [School and Politics] by Luigi Volpicelli and Nazzareno Padellaro, which counted a longer-term militant production on such a topic.

Romanini became a school inspector in the same year, that is 1935, on the eve of Giuseppe Bottai's advent (1936-1943) to the Ministry of National Education, where later (1940) the same Padellaro followed him.

A reviviscency of administrative and pedagogical expertise was linked to this complex figure of fascist leader; a ministerial tradition of international recognitions was relaunched too: the *Ufficio di legislazione scolastica comparata* [Office for School Law Comparation], reconstituted after being suppressed in 1920, started up in 1941 with the «*Bollettino di Legislazione scolastica comparata*»; an example of what a comparative approach rooted in ministerial rooms could be. Such an initiative, perhaps, calls in question, in addition to his educational consultants' contributions, Bottai's own

precedents in the Ministry of Corporations, where he had promoted study and debate initiatives about the wide and strategic theme of Corporatism, with a certain international openness, which were intended to be connatural to administrative function.

If the theme was the transition from a fascist pedagogy to a commitment within the school system of democratic Italy, I do not believe that Romanini's case would offer much more than we already know from other edited and studied sources: for example, from Agosti's biography (Scaglia 2016), from Padellaro's epuration trial (Dell'Era 2016), or from Mazza's diary (2012).

The latter, one of the founders (somehow removed) of the Italian scout movement, offers a closer example to Romanini's investment in education renewal within opposite political frames. Mario Mazza, after having in some ways anticipated it as a teacher, contributed to founding the Catholic scout association Asci. He reacted in a peculiar way, compared to the other national leaders coming from the inner Catholic movement, to the fascist suppression of the Asci (Schirripa 2007a). His efforts to camouflage a kind of strategically fascistized scouting in different educational environments, not being possible to cultivate scout organizations in the light of the sun, could be narrated as a democratic merit in the afterwar; but in those years he worked on the assumption of an intrinsic harmony between scouting and the fascist spirit. His school and extra school activism was innervated by such a premise.

In Romanini's case too, activity school suggestions had to deal with complex contextual factors. The transition from Fascism to democracy is the most clear-cut change: it engaged many intellectuals in manoeuvres of personal relocation and of new contextualization of their studies. But longer and deeper processes of change were taking place in the background. On the one hand, this is demonstrated by the persistent cultural resistance encountered by the new education movement in Italy (Bellatalla 1999), and on the other, by the mediation needed to bring activity methods into Catholic pedagogy. On these references it is highly productive to measure Romanini's work as a reviewer of international educational sources. All the more so, on the eve, if not of a «Catholic hegemony» (Galfrè 2017), of a season full of opportunities for Catholic educationists and organizations to invest in new spaces for school and extra-school initiatives. New Schools were a fairly heterogeneous and flexible subject, suitable for translation in pedagogical theories and practices that carried with them the reverberation of complex political and cultural processes. «How did it happen [...] that Catholic pedagogy was able to take possession of all the techniques of activism, without changing the dogmatic substance of teaching?» Dina Bertoni Jovine (1961) would have questioned it in one of the most significant texts about Marxist controversy against lay "activism" in Italy; her article demonstrates the persistence of some problematic issues, such as the alleged adaptability of techniques to different cultural frameworks. A comparison with the parallel example of Francoist Spain (Andrés and Braster 2006) could usefully illuminate certain dynamics of instrumental rejection and appropriation, selective removal and reformulation of new educators' ideas. It is no small thing, from this point of view, what we can read in Romanini's attempt to go *ad fontes*.

*A theoretical arrangement of new education assumptions*

The first feature catching the eye is the large part of the book developed through a philosophical approach: the whole first volume, *Le idee*, with some reverberation in the second, *Le esperienze*. This choice has to do with the author's personal inclinations, with consolidated schemes in educational manuals, with the way in which the Catholic reception of new education worked (Chiosso 2011, 215).

When Romanini wrote down the two volumes, in the middle of the century, a binary road had been traced out to assume the new education suggestions within Christian pedagogical tradition. This could be done in two directions: first of all, by channelling teachers' interests in educational innovation, by comparing experiences rather than by conducting scientific surveys, seen with very cautious interest and less accessible, in any case. We could consider the profiles of those who gathered around the educational initiatives of the publisher La Scuola and the Catholic University of Milan; perhaps Pietralba conferences (Scaglia 2014) were the most representative venue of this committed teachers' sociability. The model was a teacher engaged in trying new didactic solutions and in refining them through study and discussion, through conferences and specialized readings. To call them experimenters, even if the word occurred, would be to say too much.

The second direction, consists of metabolizing activity methods in order to find them a place in the Christian philosophy of education. Pedagogy had to remain anchored to philosophy, and it was also Maritain's line: Aldo Agazzi would soon have translated his *Education at the Crossroads* (1943) from the French edition (La Scuola, 1949). The contribution of human and social sciences had to be appreciated but well circumscribed; a continuist paradigm – *paedagogia perennis* was the formula of common use – had to neutralize the polemical and anti-institutional points of the movement. Such a way of proceeding made it possible to direct the enthusiasm of many teachers – Romanini believed it was to be the only way, more than any institutional solution, to renew the old traditional school and to root a new, widespread way of thinking – and to take as examples the initiatives of Catholic “new educators” who had moved without there being any Catholic new education, but in the watercourse of an orthodox tradition. Although it was precisely an attempt at coordination, begun in 1921 with the Ligue Internationale pour l'Éducation Nouvelle, that raised the question of a Catholic response, the phenomenon was too multifaceted to be tackled by anachronistic global condemnations. Furthermore, activity methods were attractive to educators and suitable for religious initiatives of youth mobilization and educational militancy.

The result was to affirm that the *pars construens* of new education was not so new, that Christian pedagogy already kept certain intuitions as a treasure to be rediscovered. Such a position was explicitly formulated by theorists like Mario Casotti but, in those circles, it was rooted in common sense and responded to a broader apologetic scheme, very familiar to the Catholic modernization of twentieth-century and its metabolism (Moro 1988). Promoting the assumption of an address, an initiative,

a method that potentially fell into the shadow cone of a doctrinal condemnation or had been the object of a controversy in a traditionalist and defensive way, required some steps of cooling, of de-escalation so as to minimize, as if they were ancillary, the ideological characteristics that had been attributed to him (those who, referring to an organic system of non-Christian thought, made it a target); to neutralize the polemical accents that directly belonged to its authors, its sources or its historical vicissitudes; to select some distinctive aspects of which to attest an intrinsically Christian quality.

It is the same scheme we find, for example, at the dawn of Catholic sports movement and in the rapid reevaluation of scout movement, a significant case also for the implications that this scheme may have in terms of organizational competition with the opponent (a less widespread lay association and then a short-lived socialist and communist initiative). One of the most mature documents of this defensive line is the opinion given by Luigia Tincani, founder of the School Missionary Sisters, in support of the incipient (1943) female scouting of Catholic inspiration in Italy (Schirripa 2007b, 17). A collective phenomenon or an educational approach that arose *extra moenia* could be adopted by following these logical steps, especially when the risk that the adversary would profit from it advised to cut off the delays.

In the case of new education as a whole, the game was wider and more multi-faceted but no less urgent. The challenges that were about to arise required a de-provincialization, through the comparison of international and updated experiences, of the Italian and Catholic pedagogical culture. It was necessary to bring together interests coming from teachers with a willingness to invest coming from ecclesial organizations; it was therefore necessary to examine new education experiences and highlight the aspects on which to rely on: abstraction made, in a nutshell, from the naturalist error.

### *The trunk of naturalism and its ramifications*

Naturalism: the second feature catching the reader's attention is the prominence attributed to this subject. It is useful to point out that there are at least two naturalisms to deal with, taking into account the meanings given to the term in the book. The first one is the naturalism that took so many facets from antiquity to the eighteenth century, before being catalysed by Rousseau's thought and its strong controversial potential – the fortune of Gerdil's *Anti-Émile* (1763) could be a sufficient example – and returned to occupy the scene according to Darwinist and positivist accents, with radical consequences in the field of education. The second one is the adversary that was modelled by anti-modern Catholic fight, especially starting from these latter manifestations, up to assuming articulated meanings, more suitable to describe the course of the controversy than the object itself.

In the *Quanta Cura* encyclical (1864) the term is still rather nuanced: Pope Pius IX circumscribes its effects within the political and social sphere, where «the impious and absurd principle of “naturalism”, as they call it» postulates the «civil society» to regulate itself regardless of religion. There is also a distance taken from the word – «as

they call it» – almost a declaration of lexical impertinence; but *Pantheism, naturalism and absolute rationalism* is the first title in the annexed *Syllabus of Errors*. The first and timely comments following the encyclical, however, already testify to a meaning that is gradually richer in implications, as the term is adopted within the intransigent repertoire.

Naturalism was later a fully-fledged topic of the anti-modernist campaign in the early twentieth century, with widespread reference to educational aspects. With the encyclical *Divini illius magistri* (31 December 1929) Pius XI fixed the terms of the question by articulating criticism of naturalism in education (Tognon 1992). The document offers almost an overview of the main themes of the controversy: the underestimation of original sin against the necessity of grace; the overestimation of the pupil's autonomy against the educator's authority, except for a principle of active cooperation declared by the Pope to be inherent in Christian educational tradition; the claim to submit to scientific analysis «those matters of education which belong to the supernatural order»; the remarks on sex-education, coeducation, «purity of morals».

Pope Ratti did not go into the merits of educational currents, it was enough for him to assert the falsity of «every form of pedagogic naturalism which in any way excludes or weakens supernatural Christian formation in the teaching of youth» (Acerbi 2003, 45). Jesuit father Mario Barbera did it by writing his well-known correspondence (1932) from the Nice congress of the *Ligue internationale pour l'éducation nouvelle*. Not new to in-depth examinations about new education, he began the first paragraph – entitled, precisely, *Naturalismo pedagogico* – with the due reference to the encyclical; then he offered, between a critical recording and the other, one of the thickest documents of the severe but attentive interest of Catholic opinion for the galaxy of activity education. The encyclical did not freeze that interest but it ended up responding by mobilizing Catholic pedagogy.

With a good dose of hyrenism to say the least, Romanini would have recalled the Pope's text as the basic norm on which the consensus converged, conscious or not, of the entire contemporary pedagogical movement, independently of the religious authority recognized to the Pope. The plethora of references to naturalism as a classification criterion, which weighs above all on the first of the two volumes, thus responds to a scheme that almost twenty years after the *Divini illius magistri* was still vital and would remain so for a while. On the death of John Dewey (1952), the objections of the magazine of the Society of Jesus to its influence on the American education system were still to take place under the banner of critique of naturalism (Rumi 2004, 317-318). The controversial attack by father Antonio Messineo (1956) against Maritain's *Humanisme integral* still focused on naturalism.

One could suppose a relatively rapid obsolescence after the Second Vatican Council, but a pedagogical dictionary review (Genovesi 2006) is sufficient to perceive a certain inertial resistance of the concept, precisely in the shapes that religious controversy had at the time conferred on it.

Romanini constructed the index of the first volume as if filiations and dialectical reactions were spreading from the only trunk of naturalism, representative of the spirit



of the times. He wasted no time in refuting it: his aim was to guide the reader towards a correct evaluation of the “new” pedagogical currents, starting from a cold and fair judgment of their matrix. A new way of looking at the world had affirmed itself, tributary of naturalism with limits and merits, and the educator had to be equipped to discern. In his review he wanted to show balance. The severity of his judgment towards some authors (such as Ellen Key, pp. 60 ff., but also Tolstoy) left intact an exhibited willingness to recognize acceptable aspects of their production.

The medium tone of the speech attests the overcoming of a debate that, however, still conditions it, determining the interpretative framework. The first two chapters of the first volume, *Le idee*, are entitled *Il naturalismo* (pp. 5-60) and *Digressioni e reazioni al naturalismo* [Digressions and Reactions to Naturalism] (pp. 61-208). He defined naturalism as an aptitude to apply the methods of natural sciences to human activities, as a matrix from which experiences and authors germinate or detach themselves. A matrix constituting «the background colour of contemporary thought» (p. 56); hence the need to look with detachment at the fruits of modern scientific mentality purified of misunderstandings and ingenuity, «removing, that is, any pretence of scientific dogmatism and reducing the so-called laws to what they are: *intelligent advice on didactic practice*».

In such a perspective «the naturalistic inheritance is currently acceptable not only to those who in some way relate to naturalism, but also to those who reacted to it. This is not even rejected by the Catholic pedagogy of this modern century, which also affirms, with good reason, that for a long time it has autonomously suggested such advice as its own concepts, which can be found in its most characteristic writers and schools, as elements of that *paedagogia perennis* that it supports and promotes».

As for Catholic authors, he dedicated to them the third chapter *La pedagogia cattolica* (pp. 209-268). John Henry Newman has the place of honour: Romanini emphasizes his positions on freedom of scientific research, resolutely rejects any accusation of modernism, and makes him a forerunner of scientific intuitions that naturalism would have developed differently. He would be «the most luminous and evident revelation of the autonomous initiative with which Catholicism had undertaken, and intended to conduct later, the pedagogical updating in relation to the discoveries of the various sciences» (p. 215). The review goes on with Spalding, Mercier, and Willmann and above all Maritain: he would have interpreted better than Ferrière their common master Bergson in the criticism against naturalism; its American conferences on education would be «perhaps the only systematic meditation on the educational problem» in the face of the challenges of the post-war period (p. 259). The Swiss priest Eugène Dévaud, author of *Pour une école active selon l'ordre chrétien* (1934, translated by La Scuola in 1940) is instead introduced in the fourth chapter (*L'attivismo contemporaneo*, pp. 269-323), side by side with the same Adolphe Ferrière. The teacher revaluated in balance of paidocentrism and the emphasis on character education constitute, Romanini claims at the end of the review, the specific contribution of Catholic to the international pedagogical movement.

*From fervour for activity schools to international projection*

For the second volume about *Experiences* Romanini chose a tripartite ordering criterion. The first category consists of «artistic» initiatives, the ones owing their success to the skills and commitment of the founders, without a theoretical, methodological and organizational elaboration that could make them last. Tolstoy, O'Neill, Steiner, and many of the earlier new school creators were included in this group such as Maria Boschetti Alberti, whose *scuola serena* had been a reference, with other experiences (Montecchi 2009), for Giuseppe Lombardo Radice's Italian way to school renewal: maybe the main matrix through which, in the Interwar, new education could be accessible to schoolmen; even in Romanini's case, as we have seen.

The second category includes the so called «settled» initiatives («*sistematiche*», not yet «*sistematiche*»): those which had managed to consolidate and spread through a codification effort by the founders. Such experiences had arisen from the development of a theoretical principle in a method: with a psychological (Manjón) or psychotechnical matrix (Decroly), oriented to individualization (Dalton and Winnetka plan) or to social education (Kilpatrick, Kerschensteiner); or, in the opposite direction, from the generalization of a technique: the school typography in Freinet, for example. Scout movement – a definitive solution, he would have written elsewhere (Romanini 1950), to the problem of extra-school education – is classified as a extra-school settled experience.

The distinction between artistic and settled experience further articulated the concept of *pédagogie expérimentée* due to Raymond Buyse (1935). The Belgian researcher was widely mentioned in the third and above all in the fourth chapter titled *L'esperienza scientifica* and respectively subtitled: *Le scienze ausiliarie o parapedagogiche* and *La pedagogia sperimentale*. As a Catholic scientist, he had also paid homage to *pedagogia perennis* to be able to circumscribe a space, that of experimental pedagogy, of which he was considered one of the most authoritative voices (Montalbetti 2002). A few years later, Romanini would have a dialogue with Buyse in the occasion of Scholé seminars (1956-57), the annual meeting of the Centre for Pedagogical Studies among Christian University Teachers in Brescia. In this last part of the book, the author was able to express his sensitivity towards experimental educational research: he was aware of scientific literature but even more he was aware of his audience and its perplexity towards scientific approaches applied to education. It is no wonder that the fourteen pages appendix *Elementary statistical notes applied to research in experimental pedagogy* is sometimes mentioned almost as if it had its own autonomy.

Overall, *The Pedagogical Movement Abroad* provided a useful service to the educators who faced an international panorama that had been so little ploughed by systematic reviews. In fact, the book had a certain transversal and longitudinal fortune: rather protracted in time quotations, from authors belonging to different currents and applied to multiple subjects, who welcomed it.

It was not a foregone conclusion: La Scuola publisher was a Catholic pole of a polycentric pedagogical revival. The opening to international contributions and new education, in that case inspired above all by Chizzolini, was part of a wider scenario

(Pruneri 2004): the Florence school, as it was known as in its early days (Cambi 1982) and Volpicelli's cooperation with Armando publisher are the most cited examples of a convergent but plural commitment which corresponds to a galaxy of practices inside and outside the school. Romanini's approach allowed him to interpret a current need and to be read even outside the Catholic environment. Although his conceptual plot was meant to be organic, the data he offered were also accessible without sharing the same ideological or philosophical premises.

Not only, our way of representing the rebirth of human and social sciences after Fascism is based on a strong – and not unfounded – assumption of discontinuity, as if a “Gentilian glaciation” had kept Italy out of the world. It's one of the cases that can help us look beyond this assumption.

Because of his career, Romanini can be seen as a peculiar kind of school official and militant intellectual that calls into question a distinction between «academic» and «applied» approaches to comparison (Paolone 2016). It is also true that its place within comparative studies is quite lateral, also for the contextual reasons we have described. A «minor» author compared to others, he found a space, in the awakening of Catholic pedagogy, in interpreting its lively and cautious attention to the wide scenario of New School. «*La Civiltà Cattolica*» attested, with its benevolent attention, the success of his attempt with respect to the needs of his audience: in 1949 (III, 72) the first volume was just appreciated for its «rich and insightful analysis of naturalism» and for the rare «sense of impartiality»; even more the second was favourably reviewed in 1955 (I, 82). The most significant remark concerned the bookish, rather than autoptic, origin of the information: there was no lack of someone or, at least, there will have been some other expert, among Catholic authors of pedagogical articles or books for teachers, who had travelled more and had enjoyed international relations up to that time (Barbera had died in 1947). But that was not Romanini's profile; on the other hand, the bibliographical resources accompanying his work were considerable for their pertinence and extent and the commitment to put order in such a wide and fragmented matter had not yet been attempted with such encyclopaedic obstinacy.

Romanini would later deal with «modern methods» in primary school (Romanini 1955) and, once again with passionate accents, with the designing of school spaces (Romanini 1962; Marcarini 2014, 156-8). He dedicated a monographic profile to Giuseppina Pizzigoni (Romanini 1958), appreciating her as the creator of a «self-sufficient school pedagogy». The school as a living environment, suitable for pupils' autonomy, compelling place of validation of every educational theory: it is a consequential idea with the fixed points having inspired his international mapping of twentieth-century pedagogies. Made inductively by teachers and centred on the school, free from doctrinism and concessions to mannerist innovations: this model of pedagogy is the result of an itinerary in which his professional experiences, his readings and his peculiar subjects of interest intertwine.

The attraction for science, as we have seen, is one of the most important topics. It is no coincidence that, about twenty years after his death, a series of articles written for «*Scuola italiana moderna*» on the occasion of Galileo's centenary were published in a

volume, *Scienza ed educazione*, with afterwords by Aldo Agazzi and Maria Gabriella Manfredi Romanini (1986). Here we find, relieved from any contingent reference to naturalism, the subject of scientific culture as a character of the present time; hence, consequently, the commitment so that cultural climate was consciously experienced by teachers.

These features contribute to making his approach original. It is not a sociological attitude to synchronic comparison that guides him in exploring the twentieth-century pedagogical movement. Instead, it is a sort of historical and philosophical sensibility that pushes him to updating and attracts him towards an educational movement expressing vibrant and contradictory characteristics of modernity; his enthusiasm for this polycentric and widespread subject is the motive leading him towards an international projection of his studies, and not vice versa.

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