

The peace-maker Aldo Capitini.

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Introduction

Nonviolent methodologies were used effectively for the first time by Gandhi in South Africa and later in the fight for independence against the British Empire in the early 1940s. Of course the 'first time use' of nonviolence does not mean that Gandhi was the first to use nonviolent methods, it means he was the first to give them a distinctive philosophical basis.

The aim of nonviolence is to reduce to the minimum the possible presence of violence in mankind and in human activities.

Religion in the world has had a dual role in building peace. Sometimes it was a promoter of violence, directly or indirectly. From time to time it is the deciding factor in achieving a peaceful and lasting result. In this ambivalence of religion, however, practice of religious precepts has tipped the balance toward a rather violent or nonviolent dimension.

In Italy many people are making efforts to promote a culture of peace particularly the knowledge and practice of nonviolence. Indeed, to date the person who has made the biggest commitment to nonviolence with a strong religious dimension has been Capitini.

He is also an alternative and original figure in the two dimensions of nonviolence and 'free religion' (Centro Documentazione di Pistoia [Documentation Centre of Pistoia] 2009), as he prefers to define himself.

The aim of this essay will be to explore the history of nonviolence in Italy and the role of religion in Italian society during Capitini's life time, one of the most important nonviolent peace-maker in Italy.

The first step will be to introduce the life of Capitini and his nonviolent endeavours to enlighten Italian people on Gandhi's nonviolent methodologies. Secondly the focus of this essay will be to try to show the relevance of religion in the nonviolent purpose of his activities. Finally, the essay will summarize the main points raised by this paper.

The life and times of Aldo Capitini (biography and context)

Capitini spent his life in Italy living through the experience of World War I, World War II and the 'Cold War' (which sadly he did not see the end of in 1989).

In this period, Italy went through three forms of government: monarchy, fascist dictatorship from 1925 and a Republic from 1946 onwards. These

historical and political events had a large influence on the personal history and on the intellectual and social growth of Capitini.

Three particular circumstances marked his life in this period.

There was a long illness in his youth that led to his religious conversion and the radical change of his political views. His encounter with Gandhi's nonviolence in the late 20s defined his style and methods of action. Capitini's religious conversion did not follow the traditional course, which he eventually abandoned when the Catholic Church signed the Lateran Treaty with the Fascist dictatorship in 1929. From then until the end of his days he tried to promote the reform of religion (starting from the Catholic, to expand to the other), with the aim of religion being used to focus on the persons and their needs. He also proposed that all religions should exceed their dogmatism and their authoritarian structure to be at the service of marginalized people and also of those who had no voice in society. Despite this, even though he remained a religious man his belief were counter-current to the institutional Church who condemned him and his books. The Catholic Church began a complex process of change and openness to the world with the Second Vatican Council (1962 to 1965); however Capitini was not able to see the fruits of this change, dying a few years later. However, in relation to its vision of 'open religion', the most significant and important innovations introduced by the Catholic Church appeared to him to be timid. The philosophical and religious thoughts of his training were based on, the results from the meeting with Claudio Baglietto (philosopher, and conscientious objector who died in exile in Switzerland), and some components that Fortuna (2002: 17) defined in his essay to be integral parts of the Kantian criticism (for the primacy of the moral law), idealism (Georg W.F. Hegel, Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile), Marxian analysis and Gandhian spirituality. To these elements, the political scientist and philosopher Norberto Bobbio (1984) added the influence of Giacomo Leopardi (poet and writer) and Giuseppe Mazzini (politician and philosopher). Capitini, as he wrote in his 'Letters of Religion', published posthumously in the book *The Power of All* (Capitini 1969), to escape the trap of traditional religions and to form his own ideas of religion and inspiration for his deeds, he was forced to go back 'to the teachers of religious life' (Capitini 1969: 326) that he identified with Jesus Christ, Buddha, St. Francis of Assisi, Gandhi and Mazzini (Capitini 1990: 11).

For Capitini, it was necessary that the religious dimension of each person was translated into concrete action in public life. His engagement in politics was always astute and constant, while not wishing to have any specific affiliations with political parties. The first example was his

rejection of the fascist card and then his fight against fascism. At the end of the World War II, he wrote the 'Manifesto of the Liberalsocialism', together with the philosopher and political scientist Guido Calogero. Their effort was to combine the best ideas of the liberal school with those of socialism. While he did not choose the path of party politics Capitini undertook an intense political life, gaining experience at the Centre for Social Orientation (CSO) and by making decisions in the field of education and pedagogy for a free and non-confessional public school.

The author of this essay considered the most original contribution of Capitini to society and to the intellectual world that he attended, was the concept of '*open religion*'. It was an idea so *cool* and innovative to be rejected and regarded with suspicion from the beginning. With the concept of '*open religion*' the philosopher of Perugia wanted to introduce radical changes to the dogmas and practices of traditional religions, and wished to build bridges between Western philosophy and Eastern schools of thought (especially Buddhism). Finally, Capitini wanted to transform society by focussing on the spiritual and material needs of persons, also taking into account their libertarian and egalitarian pressures. Nonviolence is the main instrument of change, becoming a lever of social change in the path of improvement that does not exclude anyone.

As mentioned above the religious dimension, especially the so-called '*open religion*', asks the individual to be open to society. As a consequence, religion is not an individualistic and inward act, instead becoming a source of inspiration for the will to change things that do not function in society. Moreover, for Capitini the nonviolence that he put into practice was a product derived from this religious aspiration. Capitini recognized the re-establishment of religion to be an important historical problem, then taking this as a key point of nonviolence. He did not want to empty the religious institutions, but wanted to overcome them instead, re-establishing full consciousness so that politics could be understood as a religious act. His reform of religion was addressed to political action both at a personal and society level.

In light of these considerations it is possible to claim that there types of nonviolence exist, '*religious*' and '*secular*'.

Religious nonviolence can be understood as a lifestyle. It is an opening to existence, freedom, development of all people, opposition to oppression and destruction, and as final point it is active resistance. A way of being and living in relationships with others who, before becoming valuable as social action (external to us), must penetrate into our consciousness and be part of us.

Meanwhile, secular nonviolence can be understood to be a pragmatic choice to resolve conflicts. Nonviolence becomes an effective method that provides better results, or less damage than, those of violent acts. In this case, the 'minimum' requirement is fulfillment of the two cornerstones of nonviolence: not to use physical violence, nor to offend the dignity of others for the duration of the conflict.

In the former, the attitude is related more to the idea of nonviolence expressed by Capitini and Gandhi, in the latter it is possible to identify the contributions of Western scholars, in fact, in the Western academic approach there is the idea of observing the connections between nonviolence and power (the analysis to obtain and maintain power).

In concluding this first general introduction to the multiple, kaleidoscopic activities of Capitini, one should take note of the fact that unfortunately he was an unheard and isolated philosopher. He did not enter into the mechanism of political parties; in a bipolar Italian system (communism vs. capitalism) he did not take sides, defining himself as a 'left-wing independent', actively engaging in politics.

It was never an *indifference*, according to the negative definition given to that term by Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci n.d.).

He was opposed and condemned by the traditional Catholic Church, and was regarded as a utopian dreamer for his idea of nonviolence and for his insight to tackle conflicts through nonviolence.

Bobbio captured the singularity of Capitini "that was a Gandhian in the land of Machiavelli, a religious heretic in the land of the Counter Reformation (and the associated indifference), a pacifist, religious, and moreover, in a country where a tradition of thought and action pacifist has never existed, "even to the point that the "great slaughter "of the first Italy in World War II caused "feelings of nonviolent tremors' comparable to occurring in the European context' (Bobbio 1969 cited in Mercurelli 2008-2009: 52).

Nevertheless, his intuitions remain more relevant today than in the past, and its proposals could still offer real opportunities to build a better world.

Capitini (National Association 'Friends Aldo Capitini' 1968) was born in Perugia in 1899 to a family of humble circumstances; his father was a simple municipal official and his mother a tailor. From an early age Capitini became interested in philosophy and literature; however until the age of 17 years he became captivated by the Futurists and nationalists who supported intervention of Italian nationalists in the 'Great War'

(World War I). From 1918-1919 he abandoned the so-called modernists and nationalists for a great humanitarian, pacifist and socialist, moreover, he was passionately committed to the study of the Latin language and Greek literature. Capitini was physically fragile and because of his great commitment to his studies he fell ill, and also discovered, in addition literature and the Bible, solidarity with those who suffered and were overwhelmed, with the 'last' (Capitini 1990: 11).

In 1919, as a self-made scholar, he acquired the Technical Institute license, then, in 1924, he enrolled into the famous Higher Normal School of Pisa, completing his Masters Degree in Philosophy in 1928. Through philosophy, he was best able to express his opposition to fascism and the traditional Church.

In 1924 the Fascists murdered the Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti formalizing the dictatorship.

In 1929 the fascist regime ended the *Concordato* (Lateran Treaty) with the Catholic Church and the Catholic religion became the state religion. This agreement considerably strengthened the prestige and power of the dictator Mussolini, with the Catholic Church becoming an indirect support to his government.

As a result Capitini significantly disassociated with the Catholic Church and became even more committed to his anti-fascist activities (Movimento Nonviolento n.d.).

Later, in 1930, he began working as a Secretary at the Higher Normal School in Pisa. He became close to anti-Fascist students, as a professor being a rare conscientious objector. Capitini knew and became a follower of Gandhi's nonviolence which highly appreciates' the idea of non-cooperation and non-lie.

In keeping with nonviolent and anti-fascist ideals (National Association 'Friends Aldo Capitini' 1968) he became vegetarian. In addition to this, he thought that recognizing the value of the life of animals gave stronger emphasis to violence against human beings (Capitini 1990: 74).

In 1933 the director of the High Normal School of Pisa, the philosopher Gentile, asked Capitini to join the Fascist Party. Capitini blatantly refused and was summarily dismissed from his post. He then applied himself to the method of nonviolent non-cooperation with an unjust and authoritarian power. In order to survive, he returned to his family in Perugia, where he undertook private lessons until the end of World War II in 1945.

Capitini adopted the propagation of anti-fascism as an important personal commitment from 1933 to 1943. To achieve this he met with groups of

young people, especially in central Italy. This activity was facilitated by the publication of three books on philosophy and religion. The books were able to pass fascist censorship for the ambiguity of their titles that attracted religious themes. The publication was also supported by the liberal philosopher Croce, who, even though in disagreement with the fascist regime, enjoyed a certain degree of freedom thanks to being internationally renowned.

The 'Manifesto of the Liberalsocialism' was outlined by the philosopher Calogero in 1940 (Eurostudium 2005). In this manifesto, Calogero collected the ideas of opposition to fascism by Capitini and other intellectuals. Capitini and Calogero sought to join the best elements of liberalism and socialism. They combined freedom and justice to provide a remarkable insight that could overcome Marxist socialism and reactionary liberalism.

Capitini was imprisoned twice for five months for his anti-fascist activities from 1942 to 1943.

The Liberalsocialism movement decided to give him a party ticket, in contrast Capitini decided not to join the party, because he wanted it to perform political lobbying.

At this point in time, the so-called 'Cold War' became apparent at the international level, dividing the world into two camps: capitalist and communist.

Simultaneously and in the same way, Italian civil society was polarized around these same two axes. Whoever was not a part of this scheme, was unlikely to have a role. Capitini, despite his clear, honest, hard antifascist efforts did not want to be part of this schematic division, mainly because he did not share many of the aspects of these two worldviews.

Finally, it should be noted that the crucial elections of 1948 were won by the Christian Democrat Party (il partito della Democrazia Cristiana), who in some way represented the views of the capitalist world in opposition to the communists' vision.

He therefore remained isolated and was not able to play an institutional role in the nascent Italian Republic.

Nevertheless, from the end of World War II until his death, he was involved in a number of important areas: religious, civil, social and political. Furthermore he promoted Social Guidance Centres, the Movement of Religion, the Italian Vegetarian Society, and the Association for the Protection and Development of Public Schools.

Additionally he became the most important exponent of nonviolence in Italy. In particular, he organized the creation of associations, groups,

magazines, national events, public meetings, seminars, conferences, and so on.

In this period, he became a professor of pedagogy at the University of Cagliari (in 1956) and in 1965 granted a transfer to the University of Perugia with the same chair.

Capitini died on 19 October 1968 following the after-effects of surgery.

Capitini's development of 'nonviolence'

In Italy nonviolence has a rather history shorter than that of pacifism. Pacifism encompasses a broad arc of associations, movements and individuals, while nonviolence, especially at its beginning, was confined to areas that are much narrower.

In the history of nonviolence in Italy, Capitini was the main protagonist, being defined as 'the Italian Gandhi' (Bergagna 1968).

Capitini approached nonviolence in the late twenties and in 1931 Gandhi visited Italy for a few days (Pisu 2006).

Capitini drew many lessons from Gandhian philosophy; he developed an overarching perspective where nonviolence became the source of inspiration for many of its activities and achievements. His work was also inspired by the concept of persuasion and openness. For Capitini the term *persuasion*, in the sense of complete conviction, indicated faith, and the deep belief in certain values and commitments. He believed that individual acts, according to the criteria of its profound consciousness, can create value and find something that is worth more than material existence and formal spirituality. Persuasion, a word which Capitini took from the philosopher Carlo Michelstaedter of Gorizia (Capitini 1990: 23-27), is the ability to pursue ones own ideals with tenacity, and the power of nonviolence, a gentle power, however determined. The *opening* is the opposite of the conservative and authoritarian vision of fascism; it is the elevation of the soul toward God. For Capitini, individuals have to open to 'all human beings, to all people, even to things' (Capitini 1990: 13). In some way, he wished that society, the Church and, traditions were opened up to a dimension of freedom and a gift to all.

First of all, through the idea of nonviolent non-cooperation he found the strength to refuse the card for entry to the fascist party, losing his job at the University.

Initially he developed the concept of *omnocracy*, the power for all, meaning that each person has the right to participate in government and control of public power through meetings, assemblies, and meetings with politicians and those who held institutional roles. These meetings had to

be public, informing people what was happening and what decisions were being taken. Furthermore, the meetings formulated criticisms and proposals, and through working groups took decisions on various issues that affected their daily lives and communities. Finally, with the omnocracy he wanted to give more definite limits to the powers of authorities, also providing the right of revocation from people if the latter were not satisfied with the work of those who represented them. Capitini founded the CSO for achieving these goals. Certainly, he was convinced of the urgency of creating a wider-base of participation at the grass-roots level in order to give force to the renewed democracy. In July 1944, he established the first CSO in Perugia, which was free, with periodical assemblies, open to all, for information about and discussion on both local and more general problems. The CSO was a successful experiment, consequently CSO spread to several Italian cities, but failed to establish itself permanently for the indifference and opposition of the party system and the reluctance of politicians to be supervised in their functions.

In 1948, the young Pietro Pinna (Ufficio Nazionale per il Servizio Civile [*National Bureau for Civil Service*] n.d.) listened to Capitini at a conference sponsored by the Movement of Religion in Ferrara. In the aftermath of that occurrence, Pinna matured his choice of conscientious objection. He was the first post-war objector. Pinna underwent a first process and a first conviction in 1949 and served Capitini as testimony in his favor. Capitini mobilized to help young Pinna to his choice of conscientious objection. For this initiative Capitini called on the support of his intellectual friends and Members of the Italian Parliament. In 1950, Capitni organized the first Italian conference in Rome on the subject of conscientious objection. Somehow, he became a forerunner of the law that would legalize conscientious objection to military service that, was put into practice 22 years later.

In January of 1952, Capitini promoted an International Conference for Nonviolence in Perugia. At the end of the meeting, he created an International Coordinating Center for Nonviolence (National Association ‘Friends Aldo Capitini’ [Associazione Nazionale ‘Amici di Aldo Capitini’] n.d.). In the same year he held another conference in Perugia to study nonviolence with respect to plant and animal life. The outcome of the conference was the creation of the Italian Vegetarian Society, with Capitini as President and based in Perugia. The vegetarian society became a collective effort after twenty years based on Capitini's personal wishes. However, forty years after his death, the Vegetarian Society

continues its activities in the same way, the only difference being its change in name to the Italian Vegetarian Association.

In 1953, Capitini also held the first West-East Asia Conference in Perugia. The aim of the meeting was to highlight the similarities between Asia and western countries, especially from nonviolence perspective. Therefore, the effort was to avoid repeating the mistakes of a history of oppression, conquests and wars.

In 1954, Capitini held a seminar of lectures and discussions on the methodology of Gandhi in Perugia.

Capitini promoted, with the help of other political forces of the Left, the 24 km March for Peace and the Brotherhood of Peoples from Perugia to Assisi, in 1961, in a historical context of international tension. The purpose was to state the wish that 'peace is prepared in time of peace' and to awaken this awareness in public opinion. The event, held in September, was successful and was attended by thousands of people. The success of the March convinced the promoters of the need for continued collaboration in the commitment for peace. Thus a federation of associations and peoples was born, giving life to the Italian Advisory Council for Peace, Capitini was appointed as President. Nonviolent people, who also participated in it, constituted their own independent group: the Nonviolent Movement for Peace, Secretary Capitini.

Capitini organized the National Conference on Disarmament Affairs in Florence in 1962, and held a seminar on techniques of nonviolence in Perugia in 1963, with the participation of leaders of the English Committee of One Hundred (a British anti-war group established in 1960 with a hundred public signatories by Bertrand Russell).

The XII Congress of the War Resisters' International happened in Rome in 1966. Capitini gave a paper on 'International nonviolence and permanent revolution'. Two meetings in Perugia were the first congresses of the Nonviolent Movement for Peace. Capitini introduced a report, on the attempts of political, and social revolution, favoring the method of violence and thinking to transform society by the simple grabbing of power. He tried to prove that a nonviolent revolution is much more effective and lasting, partly because it avoids the risks and distortions of the authoritarian practices related to violence.

Capitini was also a prolific writer in his commitment to the spread of nonviolence in Italy. The most important books and his writings on philosophy and nonviolent methods, are briefly listed here by their English titles since they are not directly relevant to this assignment:

- 1937, *Elements of a Religious Experience* (Capitini 1990), where Capitini also presented the theoretical foundations of the principles of nonviolence for the first time;
- 1949, *Nonviolent Italy*;
- 1956, *Open Revolution* and 1958 *Danilo Dolci* on nonviolence and the experience of Danilo Dolci;
- 1959, *Conscientious Objection in Italy*;
- 1962, *On the Road to Peace* and *The Nonviolence Today*;
- 1964, Capitini founded the magazine *Nonviolent Action*, which became the official organ of the Nonviolent Movement. He also founded a monthly magazine of national circulation, entitled *The Power of All* based on citizen participation in power and the means and methods available to citizens for the control of institutions from below;
- 1967, *The Techniques of Nonviolence*.

Capitini was an educator, teaching pedagogy at University. He published two books in his role as educator: *Civic Education in School and Social Life* (1964) and *Open Education* (1967). There is no doubt that these texts are another important method to convey the message of nonviolence through education, challenging authority, and learning to emancipate and to be free.

Finally, to conclude this intense review of Capitini's commitment to nonviolence, it must also be remembered that he fought to help whoever was being persecuted in person for the nonviolent ideal. Among those people he engaged, it is fundamental to mention Pinna, Dolci (a social activist, sociologist, popular educator and poet. He is best known for his opposition against poverty, social exclusion and the mafia in Sicily), and don Lorenzo Milani (a priest and educator. He is best known for his civic education of the poor, and for his fight against injustice and violence. He was also involved in many activities in defense of conscientious

objectors, and the educational value of his experience as an educator in the fifties and sixties).

Dolci had several similarities with the experiences of Capitini. They were both anti-fascists, rejecting fascism and paying a price for this rejection. They both made a commitment to the choice of the most marginalized, adopting the tools of nonviolence to combat what they considered to be evil.

Moreover, both of them felt that education was important. Capitini was not only a professor of pedagogy, but also a great facilitator of free growth from the bottom of consciousness. Dolci thought that no real change comes when there is no participation of stakeholders. He developed the *maieutica [Socratic]*, a methodology that helps to empower people, drawing on their own energies and responses.

Lastly, Capitini and Dolci were uncomfortable and viewed with disdain by the authorities and traditional institutions, including the Catholic Church, which had a very strong presence in Sicily where Dolci accomplished his main work.

Capitini came to know Dolci during his fast in protest after a girl died of starvation in Sicily in 1952. Capitini wrote to him and from that moment on, the two of them continued a reciprocal exchange of opinions and suggestions that kept them in constant contact. Dolci also had the opportunity to form important relations with the group of intellectuals who knew Capitini.

The role of religion in Capitini's work, and how this contrasts with institutional religion

This section will introduce the vast literature generated by Capitini on religious themes and the deeds taken by him. In addition, this part of the essay will illustrate the strength of the religious dimension that affected the lives of Capitini.

'During World War I was a teenager, but I followed the tragedy of humanity... Moreover, I suffered a long painful illness and was unable to work. Thus, I understood the limit of my activist civilization in the fibres of my body, which gave full value to act, to violence, and to enjoy, and I felt a deep interest in and solidarity with, the problems of those who suffer, those who cannot act, and those who are overwhelmed.'

I would need to make a plan where suffering people were perfectly fine, and not thrown on the edge of civilization, waiting for death and nothingness. Then my religious requirements really started'

(Capitini 1990: 11)

Hence forth the path of the religious Capitini began, and also his fulfilment for human beings.

As previously mentioned, the anti-fascist efforts of Capitini became stronger after the Catholic Church decided to sign the Lateran Treaty with Mussolini.

In 1937, he published *Elements of a Religious Experience* (Capitini 1990). He outlined his religious philosophy, in three of four chapters. Another fundamental book to better understand Capitini's ideas on religion is *Religious Life* (Capitini 1985). Last but not least, the 'Letters of Religion' (Capitini n.d.) are an important step in his religious path. These letters are a valuable anthology of sixty-three letters written from 1951 to 1968.

The key ideas taken from these documents are compresence, open religion, you-all people, gratuitous adjunction 'freely-given', and non-mendacity.

Capitini identifies the idea of compresence in the value of all, together. However this does not negate personal individuality, instead to be together embraces each creature and saves them, bringing them towards the full realization of the *well*. Moreover, in the compresence next to the dead are the live, engaged in one enterprise to overcome the logic of violence. Capitini wanted that reality to become a space of freedom for everybody. Compresence needs to be implemented together with all beings, living or not, to create values and freedom from all violence and evil.

To do this, all institutions and philosophies must be open. Religion is no exception to this rule, or rather religion, especially the Catholic religion, must be open to people in a free and gratuitous way, because every being is 'sacred', every being deserves love and absolute respect. The act of faith is therefore a free act, a gratuitous adjunction. Consequently, there is no need for an institution to serve as a means for salvation. Capitini 'testifies the superficiality of any institution wishing to present itself as a gateway' (Fortuna 2002: 25). It follows that in an open religion perspective, the distinction between priests and ordinary believers does not make sense, because God will enter the lives of everyone. Capitini's prophetic religion radically refutes traditional religion and designates it as a new reality achieved through concrete actions (Vigilante 2000).

According to the insights of Capitini traditional religions need to be rethought and reformed deeply. He identifies four main reasons to understand with a reasonable likelihood because religions have lost their

aptitude to be innovative and must radically transform to society and mankind.

It is possible to summarize these reasons, exhibiting that: a) many facts that constituted the historical basis of religion have proved to be incorrect; b) many ideas, deemed to be central and fundamental rules, have not proved to be the most feasible and practicable, c) the essence of religion is no longer considered the adherence to formal rituals and loyalty to the institutions in their crystallized power; d) religions rather than being prophetic and playing a role in social change, have often proved to be a prop of the established power and an element of conservation, both in social and political patterns (National Association ‘Friends Aldo Capitini’ [Associazione Nazionale ‘Amici di Aldo Capitini’] n.d.).

The gratuitous adjunction ‘freely-given’ indicates the difference with traditional religions. Open religion is drawing nearer to people. It is a spontaneous adjunction, a giving of oneself from within and thus gratuitous increment and pure offer. With the concept of gratuitous adjunction Capitini adds value, a positive trend, an improvement to human life from the persons closest to him.

The religious life of Capitini is a life open to you-all, where it is possible to meet God through ‘you’. God is open to all and creates a relationship. Thus, people and all beings can build a journey of justice and freedom in daily life. In this path, nonviolence and non-lie (no lies about peoples' intentions or actions) are the means to foster this new religiosity effectively.

Capitini was also one of the first scholars in Italy to understand the significance of relations between East and West. He was probably favoured in this comprehension from having adhered to the idea of nonviolence introduced by Gandhi. In the religious thoughts of Capitini there are many references to Buddhist philosophy. The scholar Vigilante (2010) states, in his paper, that there are many similarities between Capitini religiosity, and Buddhism. Capitini lived the experience of suffering as the way to religious conversion. Suffering in Buddhism is a significant feature of the four 'noble truths'. Furthermore, Buddhists view the subject as unthinkable outside of a relational situation with the entire system of living beings. The Buddhist world is interdependent, living beings are interconnected and the salvation of each is possible only with the salvation of others. The respect for life, all life forms, and the desire not to hurt others are also important. Buddhism is aware that the reality is very different from what it ought to be; however mankind has the resources (internal and otherwise) to meet the challenges of reality.

Capitini is fully within this vision, its is the vision of nonviolent commitment. Finally, Buddhism has two relevant features for Capitini: a) it teaches universal brotherhood, the attention to the suffering and the equality of all living beings, b) Buddhism is a religion that is not based on authority or on the divinity of its founder, but the effectiveness of its teachings. The latter point ties together theory and practice, thereby Buddhism was a fertile ground for reflection and action of the philosopher from Perugia.

The religious commitment of Capitini consists of many activities. The followings are the most important in this field.

In 1946, he arranged the first meeting on religious problems at that time. Representatives of different currents of religious, political, social, religious scholars, and free researchers were involved. With this conference, he wanted to examine the Italian situation and to find a synthesis between social and religious life. In 1947, he held a second seminar, always with the same issues. In the same year, he also held a third symposium. As a result of these important meetings, the Religious Movement was established. Its aim was the struggle for religious freedom in Italy, the promotion of conferences; an association of ex-priests to assist those in difficulty to the discrimination of the Church; and publishing and distribution of books and pamphlets on religious problems. In 1948, the Religious Movement held the first Italian congress for religious reform in Rome.

Capitini attended the World Congress of Religions for Peace Foundation, held in London in 1950. He proposed the establishment of a Nonviolent Religious International Movement; nevertheless the suggestion was not accepted. He protested against the appeal made by the Meeting to the ‘so-called religious leaders’, saying that leaders are responsible for compromise of states and wars, and that the Congress had to address directly appeal to people individually.

Capitini participated in the Congress of Vedantaha in London in 1951. The theme was ‘Peace, unity of the world, the spiritual community’.

Together with Emma Thomas (an English Quaker), Capitini founded the Centre for Religious Orientation (CRO). CRO began its activities in Perugia with free regular discussions open to all.

Capitini wrote extensively on religious themes, this essay has already mentioned his most important writings, but its production is much broader and at least deserves to be reported.

In 1948, he published *Religious Problem Today* (Capitini 1948).

In 1950, he composed the *New Social Relations and Religious Reform* (Capitini 1950).

In 1955, he created *Open Religion* (Capitini 1955).

In 1957, he wrote *I Argue the Religion of Pius XXII* (Capitini 1957).

In 1961, he issued *Non-Believing Baptized* (Capitini 1961).

Finally, he edited the *School Newspaper* between 1960 and 1961 with four issues. This initiative was born from the meeting of Capitini with Don Milani, a priest who had distinguished himself for his educational activities and work on social improvement at that time. Don Milani was not appreciated for his ideas and activities by the Catholic Church, who then had him moved away to a small village in the Tuscan countryside.

According to foregoing, there is no doubt whatsoever of the contrasted relationship between Capitini and institutional religion.

His opposition to institutional religion started in 1929 with the Lateran Treaty between the fascist dictatorship and the Catholic Church. It became increasingly stronger with each passing year and did not undergo any afterthought. Indeed, there were several events that contributed to a widening of the gap, rather than of a filling in. Initially, when he published his book *Open Religion*, a summary of his philosophical thoughts about religion and his practical proposals for renewal of religion the Suprema Sacrae Congregatio Sancti Officii [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] condemned the book, placing it on a list of books that were forbidden reading for Catholics. He replied to the conviction of the Holy Office with a book in which he analyzed the speeches of Pius XXII, Pope at the time, concluding that the religion professed by Pope Pius XXII could not be the same as that professed by him. This was because, according to Capitini, the religion of Pope Pius XXII did not unite humanity, but instead dividing people. The religion of Capitini also wanted to offer something more (the adjunction) of what he believed was well with maximum freedom and openness to all.

In 1958, there was another important episode that marked a growing break in the relationship between Capitini and religious institutions. On the basis of two well-known processes of a bishop who had publicly condemned a married couple whose only guilt was to marry in a civil ceremony. The processes were concluded with the acquittal of the bishop and the condemnation of the spouses. After following the story, Capitini sent a letter to the Archbishop of Perugia, asking for himself to be removed from the list of baptizers of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Around fifty people emulated his choice a few months later.

As a final point, Capitini also promoted A.D.E.S.S.P.I. (Associazione per la difesa e lo sviluppo della scuola pubblica italiana [Association for the protection and development of the Italian public school]). This association was launched to defend and promote the rights of everyone to an education. In particular, the Association defended the freedom of teaching by attempting to make formal education similar to the confessional. To achieve this, the Association was the guarantor and controller of legislative and administrative power. The Association was a very active and efficient in pursuing its goals and Capitini was very active supporter and promoter of the initiatives.

Definitely, it is clear that the traditional Church could not appreciate the work and commitment to this person, who despite being deeply religious did not meet any of the traditional rules and made no secret of his request for institutional religion leaders to make some significant, deep and radical reforms. It is also obvious that the situation in Italy at that time did not offer much freedom to people as inconvenient and significant as Capitini. The secularization of society in Italy has been rapid since the 70's; however the first of these, respect for authority and the domain of traditions, were constitutional elements of society.

With regard to the role played by religion in the life and works of Capitini it is quite certain that it was relevant, without fear of contradiction. '... it is enough to give a rapid glance at the titles of Capitini's books and see how many times the words 'religion', 'religiosity' and 'religious' appear to realize that such an insistence not only cannot be random, but testifies to the fundamental and decisive option, ...' (Fortuna 2002: 17). Further confirmation can be extracted from Bobbio's document (Bobbio 1984) on Capitini, where reference to the origins and religious philosophy of Capitini are clearly evident.

It is possible to state that without deep religious motivation Capitini would not have been pushed so hard to act in the social and political life. Nonviolence, and non-cooperation are the 'means' he used to achieve his goals of social change and religious innovation. For these reasons, he was deeply convinced that only thanks to these ideas and tools could human beings truly improve their fate.

Conclusion

There is a great consistency of thought with the personal life of Capitini. Moreover, within Capitini exists a vaster intuition and a greater and more perfect vision of the needs of mankind. The discovery of nonviolence makes this an unbeatable view of finding the means for its realization.

These instruments are perfectly in line with his philosophy and his way of seeing things. From this was born a fruitful 'marriage' of dozens of initiatives, publications, and writings. His commitment involved many people, associations, and groups. On his ability to act, he generated new patterns of comparison, analysis and action.

The most striking demonstration of the validity of his significant commitment is demonstrated by the legacy he left. Forty-three years after his death, the Nonviolent Movement is still in existence, the *Nonviolent Action* magazine and his meaningful insights are still valid today, being able to draw the attention of scholars and intellectuals who have the expertise to fully assess Capitini's legacy.

In addition, there has been a wide spread of nonviolence and its methods, and in Italy the first degree-oriented peace research, was established by the University of Pisa and Florence in the academic year 2001-2002. On the other hand, it must be said that civil Italian society still has to acknowledge the idea of nonviolence as an operational tool for conflict transformation, in order to become an overwhelming majority, and the route of religious change remains very long and difficult.

On the whole Capitini has made a significant and real contribution to the development of nonviolence, starting from its condition of 'free religious' and this commitment has not disappeared.

The author of this paper would like to complete this essay with a sentence quoted in a book where Capitini was cited. The sentence is by the socialist politician Pietro Nenni, a person who did not know Capitini very well, but who nonetheless appreciated his work. Although short it summarizes in a clear, effective and illuminating manner the uniqueness, diversity and commitment of Capitini. On the death of Capitini he wrote: '... Aldo Capitini was counter-current during the time of Fascism and then again in the post-Fascism era. Maybe it is too much for one human life, however beautiful it is' (Nenni 1983: 228).

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