
MYSTERY IS NOT A PROFESSION

FOLLOW THE NAKED VOICE, DOCILE TO THE HAND COVERING THE EYES

by Luigino Bruni

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“The Master said, »At fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities. At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of Heaven. At sixty, I heard them with docile ear. At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right.«”

Confucius Quotes

Ideal and spiritual communities can hope to become authentic places of human blossoming if they manage to walk on the brink of their own disintegration. When, on the other hand, the fear of the possibility of one's own end becomes too strong and prevails, the life of the members withers due to a serious lack of air and sky. Only the ridges of the high altitudes allow the view of landscapes that are wide enough to (almost) satisfy the desire for infinity that pushes people with a "vocation" to offer their lives to communities to which they entrust essential pieces of their freedom and interiority. But as soon as the caravan loses altitude in search of safe bivouacs where to fix the tents, the places and horizons immediately become too narrow: we just have to dismantle the camp quickly and resume climbing. On the ridges there is a risk of slipping and falling, but it's only from there that you can touch the sky. Many communities have become extinct simply because they tried to make their people really live (and, sometimes, a sprout reappears rising again from the broken trunk); others have survived because they have never begun to live daring a full life. Christianity was born out of the disintegration of its first community. Jesus saved his own because he did not "save" them by bringing them to safe and well-guarded places. He slipped into the underworld, and it was from there, in the amazement of all, that he began his resurrection.

In ideal-driven communities something similar happens to what we live with our sons and daughters. In the morning we secretly watch them put their ties or blouses on in front of the mirror. We are proud of their beauty and goodness, and happy to let them go, and they never cease to amaze us when we see them return every night. Because we know that one day they won't come back, but if we really let them go, we can hope that in another day they really will. Families and communities die when the fear of the possible non-return of those close to us takes away the joy of seeing them leave in the morning, reducing the pride felt about their beauty to the point of perverting it in jealousy. To try to stay in the high and

luminous trajectories, a decisive operation is the custody of the difference between the ideal community and the ideal of the community. In other words, everything should be done so that the person who arrives because of a call does not identify the ideals that attract them and seduce them with the community itself and with its practices. However, it is all too common for ideal-driven communities and organizations (IDO-s) to present themselves as the perfect incarnation of the ideals that inspire and animate them. That's because the temptation of the community to present itself to its members as the ideal to live and follow is too strong. Also because the ideal-community identification is very much appreciated by both people and the community, especially in the early stages - but it is at the very beginning that we should act in a persistent direction and contrary to the "natural" one.

So it happens that instead of marking and maintaining the surplus of the ideal of the community over its practices, the IDO-s *operationalize* their "charisma" in a set of actions, rites, liturgies, individual and collective rules. We are all convinced, and all of us in good faith, that the rules, regulations and practices are the perfect certified copy of the ideal; that the way, the only sure way to make the encounter with the voice calling us yesterday concrete today is to follow those rules and practices, *sine glossa*. The founders and communities make this perfect translation because they believe that without the *operationalisation* of ideals their community will have no future. They gradually eliminate the surplus of the ideal over the community, and so without wanting or knowing it, they actually prevent the charisma from continuing to work new things in the future, because novelty flourishes only from the wounds/embrasures of the surplus-discards between ideals and their historical translation - the unintended effects are always the decisive ones in collective experiences. When this surplus is gone, the free and infinite spirit becomes a technique. The "what is it?" - that is, the exclamation of the heart that comes every time we come across the manna (*man hu*: what is it?) in the desert of a spiritual event of salvation - becomes: "how does it work?", "how do I realise it?", "how do I put it into practice?". The first encounter that generated the desire to know who and what that marvellous voice was progressively turns into a repertoire of good practices and rules to follow in order to remain "faithful". Also because communities cannot be born without some translation of the charisma into practice, but this translation itself risks silencing the charisma that generated them. A paradoxical tension, which is vital and always decisive.

All this is very well known to Biblical Humanism. The Bible has done almost everything possible to distinguish YHWH from the Law and the word of the prophets who spoke in his name (without always succeeding). But if the Bible had lost this overflow of God over its words, it would have used the word as a string to trap God, reducing him to an idol (every idolatry, even the "secular" ones, is a double string: men who bind the divinity and the divinity that, once transformed into an idol, binds its worshippers-glamorizers). The words of Scripture can generate other true words because they are the sacrament of a reality the mystery of which they do not know. Biblical humanism has succeeded in saving this surplus thanks to the prophets. Similarly to them, the founders of charismatic communities are called to be the first guardians of the surplus of the charisma over the words of the charisma. But when ideals come to coincide with the whole of the community practices, the free interior space is progressively reduced in individuals. And the

first desire to know what and who the mystery we had encountered was gradually becomes a simple profession.

All this has very concrete and sometimes dramatic existential consequences. Many members of IDO-s go into deep crisis when they realize that although they are surrounded by practices and words that only and always talk about spirituality and ideality, in fact they no longer know what inner life and spirituality really is. And it is not uncommon for people who started out in them as youth with a great thirst for spirituality to discover themselves impoverished as adults - in precisely what should have represented their distinctive trait and the ideal of their lives. They can no longer say true and wise words to anyone, not even to themselves. When someone meets them, they find themselves in front of a profession, of technical answers without the specific competence in the spirit that only the practice of freedom can generate in an inhabited heart. They find that what they possess is an ideal that has become ethical and practical, that no longer speaks of spirituality, or life, or God. The cancellation of surpluses between the God of the community and the community because it was presented as the perfect incarnation of that God cancelled the inner and most secret space where the inner life is cultivated and nourished. And after talking about spirituality for many years, they suddenly find themselves in a neo-atheistic condition. They feel that they have only used techniques, they have remained on the surface of true inner life for a lack of freedom and breath. Because once the words of the community are extinguished, they can no longer speak to God, or of God, or to their own hearts - a dramatic discovery, which often produces infinite anger and pain, but which can sometimes become a great blessing if a resurrection begins in that hell. Still others, and these are the saddest and most common cases, continue to live until the end, identifying themselves with the profession without ever realizing that they have lost contact with the spirituality that once attracted them.

Communities live and make people live well if they help their people never to lose the dialogue about "who are you?". If they leave them free spaces for the soul and life to fill (never completely) with personalized dialogues that feed the questions and reduce the simple and equal answers for all. Because the real voices calling us know only the "you" of the second person singular: collective nouns do not work for these very serious things. They only work if they free themselves from the practices and the Law to allow everyone the freedom to know and follow the spirit that speaks to everyone in a different language. Community practices are only good if they coexist with individual ones, born of different words whispered by the same ideal-charisma, every day, to everyone, in an essential biodiversity. But all this is extremely dangerous and therefore very rare. Always there is the fear that the best people and the ones most attracted by the peaks slip from the ridge; that they become so free that they do not come back home in the evening, that they sleep in mountain huts to venture on new solitary climbs of the mountains of youth at dawn. And so, almost always, communities fill all inner spaces, they crowd the landscape, and find themselves with people who are less alive and fruitful but safer and more aligned - who feel great as young people, but bad as adults and old people.

These processes are mostly inevitable and tend to happen in every community's life. Including families, where after the early days of falling in love dominated by

"who are you?", we soon move on to "how does it work? But, as we know very well, families don't work anymore if the questions don't come back every now and then: "Who are you?", "Who am I?", "What have we become?". Moses, the man who spoke to YHWH "mouth to mouth", never saw the face of God. He knew and recognized his voice, but not his face. Once, once only, at the height of a wonderful dialogue with the voice, Moses asked for the impossible: "Show me your glory!". YHWH answered him, "I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen" (33:21-23). Communities must learn to be docile under the hand of their own ideals covering their eyes. To be content with the naked voice. To know that in those very rare times when the hand is removed they can only see the back. The practices, the rules, the objects of the community "cult" are only copies of the back of the ideal seen in some very special moment of light. But the face, the intimacy and the light of the eyes remain and must remain mystery and desire, and, above all, must not be confused with the back. When Mary Magdalene, in tears, met the Risen One, she did not recognize his face: she recognized a voice calling her by name.