

Onorato Castellino

Speech by Elsa Fornero (held at the University of Turin, Faculty meeting, 17/12/2007) in remembrance of Onorato Castellino, who passed away on December 11, 2007

Onorato Castellino disliked commemorations, and would have flinched at the idea of a remembrance ceremony in his honour. Nothing would be further from Onorato's liking than fishing for compliments or playing upon easy emotions. He was indeed very *bourgeois* in the sense of embracing the values – not the rituals – of the *bourgeoisie*. Unaffectedness is certainly among these values and I would like to apply the same quality to my words and make this an affectionate recollection, not a celebration. This particularly applies to a remembrance in this Council that has witnessed many episodes of short-termism, proneness to compromise on important issues, lack of courage. Onorato was above all this, and, as we all well remember, he was able to accept other people's imperfections.

In my opinion, Onorato represented a rare example of what a University professor should be like and for this reason my speech is especially addressed to students and young colleagues who hadn't the chance to know him well or haven't known him at all. As a professor, Onorato had a well earned reputation of being very clear, but also strict and rigorous. The first impression he gave was that you were unwittingly below his level. As students and young colleagues we always felt inadequate in front of him, fearing to be caught with a verb out of place, a wrong *consecutio*, bad logic. Immediately after that, however, you discovered in him a complete lack of arrogance, and a great availability for explanation, exchange of ideas, dialogue. His superiority did not come from overconfidence, but from intelligence, seriousness, a sense of duty and dedication to anything he was up to. And from his humanity. A US friend, as I informed him of Onorato's passing away, wrote to me "He was an intelligent and large hearted man".

A large hearted man – he personally and very discreetly helped people in distress and very discreetly donated to numerous institutions - and an upright one. His moral integrity resulted in innumerable small episodes in which he "set a good example". Very often he refused to be paid for his professional activities arguing that he thought he was receiving enough for his main position as a university professor. I will mention only one specific episode of civic virtue out of innumerable I have witnessed: once, on a crowded bus, unable to reach the validating machine before his bus stop, he tore his ticket as he had not been able to validate it.

This is not the occasion to retrace his scientific activity (we will consider to take initiatives for this in the future, always in the sober, academic light of what he would have desired); what I would like to underline here is his strong sense of being a teacher and of belonging to the University of Turin. Onorato acted as a teacher for all of us, without haughtiness, with great humility. He taught us the great responsibility of being a teacher and the real meaning of the words "to invest in human capital". He never considered teaching activities as time subtracted to research, and he was sorry to perceive the opposite belief in some colleagues. He never thought of customizing his course to his knowledge; rather, he always tried to widen his knowledge, to tailor his course to the best students, since, as he said, "if you keep the level of your course high, you can give the chance to the less prepared students to grow, while if you lower the level you will lose the good students forever".

Endowed with a very precise accounting mind, he used to say that a lecture that had not been scrupulously prepared could turn into a great social waste (for example, for a two hour lecture with 300 students, it meant 600 wasted hours). He never gave a lecture without having refreshed in advance his knowledge on the topics to be dealt with. When he accepted to teach the course in development economics, he studied for months, believing that this was a chance not to be missed. As he realized he had been left behind the latest developments of economic analysis, he took a

sabbatical year (the only one in his career) to follow an econometrics course in London and catch up with his youngest colleagues.

For all these reasons students loved him. They loved him as a teacher, an example of clearness and lucidity, with a great intellectual and personal charm: such masters are so rare these days!

As a scholar, Onorato Castellino was first of all a man detached from ideologies but devoted to logic, extremely precise and conscientious, with a great passion for his job, always ready to acknowledge other people's point of view. He was never a victim of academic fashions. When I joined the Department of Economics, the Italian economic debate was characterized by complex - and often useless - diatribes on marxism and capitalism, and economists split into different factions.

Onorato Castellino was ill at ease with this state of affairs because he did not line up with the dominating "school", and he was looked down upon by some colleagues for having decided to study pension and health systems, considered as an apparently trivial matter. He did so, however, considering his subject not as a pure issue of accounting, but as a key aspect of social development. He interpreted economics as a social discipline, and believed that social problems had to be addressed with adequate scientific tools; he liked to represent social problems in a formal, mathematical way, but without splitting theory from reality. He had a great respect for numbers, although he was always ready to re-discuss them, as, he believed, complex concepts are hard to measure.

He never shirked what he considered as a university professor's responsibilities towards society. He made himself available for Government commissions studying the pension issue and looking for solutions. He was keen on translating his studies into actual policies. He believed in market economy and in individual responsibility and had no different solutions for the left and for the right. He considered public expenditure as a very serious not only economic but also moral matter and was firmly against the privileges often hidden behind public solidarity. Some concepts he formulated, such as the "pension debt", are now used by the OECD and by some central banks.

Informed of his passing away, Professor Mario Monti, a colleague and former EU Commissioner, said of him: "This is the man I have admired most in my life". I want to end this remembrance by wholeheartedly embracing Monti's words.