

The doyen of Italian sociology passed away on November 13, 2024, in Rome. In 1961, he became the first holder of a chair in sociology in Italy at La Sapienza University in Rome. Before this, sociology had been absent from academic institutions. During the fascist regime, economics and political science absorbed social studies, and idealism and philosophical historicism contributed to its marginalisation. Benedetto Croce, the leading figure of this intellectual movement, deemed sociology a pseudo-science. Ferrarotti played a crucial role in reviving a discipline that had suffered from such a significant cultural stigma.

His encounter with sociology, as he often mentioned, was entirely casual. While still a boy and in frail health, his family, who lived in Bassa Vercelese (Piedmont), sent him to San Remo on the Ligurian Riviera for his studies. There, he discovered the thinkers of French positivism in the town library. Later, in 1949, he graduated in philosophy from the University of Turin, with a thesis focused on the sociology of Thorstein Veblen. His success was closely tied to his supervisor, Nicola Abbagnano, an eminent philosopher who introduced existentialism to Italy. Abbagnano encouraged him to pursue further studies in sociology.

In 1951, he was appointed director of the journal *Quaderni di Sociologia*. Later, in 1967, he launched *La Critica Sociologica*. Through these efforts, he aimed to elevate sociology from what was previously seen as a "sick science" to a discipline that could gain academic autonomy and public recognition. In 1962, he was invited, along with the pioneers of post-war sociology, to establish the Faculty of Sociology in Trento, which became the first of its kind in Italy.

Ferrarotti was a scholar dedicated to integrating theory with empirical research. His study of classical works, combined with a profound understanding of the latest developments in American and European sociology, enabled him to produce a significant body of work throughout his long academic and extracurricular career. This began at the Centro Studi Olivetti, a hub of innovation established by the visionary entrepreneur Adriano Olivetti, who was the owner of Italy's first typewriter factory. Ferrarotti also served briefly as a senator in the Italian Republic. His extensive output consists of numerous books, articles, interviews, and research reports, including classic studies on Max Weber and empirical investigations into trade unionism in America, as well as the urban and social transformation of Rome as a capital.

One of the key themes explored by Ferrarotti is the role of religion and the sacred. His contributions to the sociology of religion are noteworthy for several reasons. At a time when the idea of secularisation was predominant, Ferrarotti reintroduced the dialectical tension, as proposed by Durkheim, between the sacred and religion. He investigated the modern transformations of the sacred and challenged the assumption that religion is inevitably declining in industrialised societies.

In 1978, he published *Studies on the Social Production of the Sacred* in collaboration with a group of young researchers. Ferrarotti argued that beneath the sacred canopy of religion, human beings imagine alternative meanings beyond the immediate utility and short-term solidarities individuals pursue. He revisited this idea several times in his works, including *The Paradox of the Sacred* (1983), *A Faith*

*Without Dogmas* (1990), *The Desecrating Religion* (2013), and *The Christian Idea of Proximity and European Identity* (2023).

Ferrarotti was also a teacher to many students and scholars: notable figures in the sociology of religion include Maria Immacolata Macioti, who passed away in 2021, and Roberto Cipriani.