

The Collegium Ramazzini and the primacy of scientific truth

Il Collegium Ramazzini e il primato della verità scientifica

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Our time is characterized by the enormous expansion and the primacy of industry and trade, at the expense of culture (including science) and humanism.

The primary and, too often, unique goal of industry and trade is profit. The rôle of culture is instead to generate and defend the truth. The commitment of humanism is to pursue an anthropology respectful of human needs and dignity, and involved in the preservation of natural resources and the human environment. Culture is the inalienable basis of humanism, while industry and trade, in pursuing their interests, may be incompatible with both culture and humanism.

The strategy of industry and trade, in order to meet their objectives even when in conflict with culture and humanism, has been marked by the creation of an alternative pseudoscientific culture, whose major aim is to pollute truth instrumentally, by contrasting culture and science and by muffling the voice of humanists.

This is the real scenario which the adherents of culture, and therefore true scientists, must face nowadays, with the sad perception of the enormous power of industry and trade and of the weakness of culture and humanism, only sometimes made less severe by the indestructible belief that truth must overcome.

In the name of truth and humanism, a major rôle of culture and science at the present time should be to contrast the exploitation of resources, the poisoning of the environment, and the attacks upon life and human health, by a type of industry and trade excessively oriented only to profit.

In the vanguard of this crusade stands that part of the scientific community primarily involved in the defence of the planet and of human life. The consequence of their aim, i.e. to help the planet and life on it to survive, the complexity of the problem, the difficulties in finding support for their activity and, all too frequently, the malevolent attacks of the economic powers (too often made possible also by the collaboration of ancillary “science”) and, not infrequently, a sense of loneliness, altogether make the life and activity of the scientific community very hard.

The resistance and the indestructible tenacity of the scientific community not to be overcome is born of an awareness that the stakes are high – life or not – a dilemma which needs to be faced promptly, since the ongoing processes of technological development and economic globalization are dramatically accelerated.

The present situation and its consequent accelerated progression were already foreseen by leading scientists some decades ago. The awareness of it was the main reason why the Collegium Ramazzini was created in 1982.

The Collegium Ramazzini is an academic assembly of 180 experts on the relationships between developmental models, resources, and human health or human diseases, chosen on the basis of their scientific knowledge and commitment and on the inalienable prerequisite of their belief in the independence of culture and science. The Collegium in fact does not depend on any interest group, public or private. The aim of the Collegium is to defend life. Its discipline is the habit of truth.

The Collegium Ramazzini has very limited means. A small number of Fellows and, parallelly, no ambition of power or visibility; its aspiration is rather to be a not visible entity acting throughout all the channels available to its Fellows. Doctor Selikoff loved to define the independent academy as “an invisible collegium”.

At this time, the main goal of the Collegium cannot reasonably be to undertake unlimited projects and to hope for infallibly successful outcomes. Its *raison d'être* is rather to pursue the lesson of truth, to be the house and the forum for those who spend their lives in the name of truth, and to give solidarity to those who, in pursuing the truth, are attacked and humiliated.

How can we weigh the achievements of 18 years of life of the Collegium Ramazzini in the balance? Superficially, the net results are the realisation of several important conferences, an annual forum (the Ramazzini Days in Carpi, birthplace of the Master), several widely appreciated scientific publications, statements on some urgent and major environmental and occupational health hazards, and interactions with several national and international institutions and academic bodies.

Over and above all these, less evident, but certainly major goals have been reached. We are a compact group of people, practising the same scientific philosophy, whose interrelationship has been

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strengthened by developing a common language and a link of friendship. Furthermore, the Collegium represents for all the Ramazzini Fellows, more and more, a firm point of reference. Finally, we are fully aware that we are contributing to perpetuate the tradition of and respect for truth in science.

After 18 years, the Collegium has been consolidated; Ramazzini Fellows are nowadays aware of the scientific and social network in which we must move, and our targets are now clear. The Collegium is therefore planning a second stage in its life, with

expanded programmes, which do not necessarily require an expansion of the statutory number of Fellows, but rather the careful search for synergies with national and international academies, institutions and agencies.

Furthermore, the Collegium is now seeking to have a more representative number of Fellows from emerging countries, where the same hazards experienced by the industrialized nations are now being transferred, without those controls which should have been made mandatory by past lessons.