

# Aldo Capitini on Opposition and Liberation



# Aldo Capitini on Opposition and Liberation:

*A Life in Nonviolence*

Edited by

Piergiorgio Giacchè

Translated by

Jodi L. Sandford

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This book is dedicated to all people who have furthered  
the concept of inclusion, peace, and nonviolence;  
opposing fascism, prevarication, and prejudice of any sort.



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## PREMISE

### UPSIDE-DOWN POWER: THE STRENGTH OF NONVIOLENT CAPITINIAN PERSUASION

This well-edited Capitinian book—by Piergiorgio Giacchè, who has taken great “care”, and here the most coherent synonym of care I believe is “commitment”—has at its heart the inseparable unity of opposition and liberation. And may I say it would not be a stretch if we transformed that conjunction “and” into “is”: opposition is liberation. On the other hand, Aldo Capitini was an unusual intellectual, “persuaded” nonviolent and open educator, admirable architect of bridges for peace and for social justice, and vegetarian in the profoundly political sense of the term. For Capitini the very act of opposing close mindedness of History, institutions, violent pseudo-pedagogy, etc., necessarily entails a tenacious search for the path to emancipation. In this we find a “Kantian” Capitini where the fundamental and indeed indispensable question of what Enlightenment really is returns to provoke us. For the Umbrian philosopher non-philosopher to escape from being a minority translates into a labor of liberation from that close mindedness by virtue of a substantial, continuous reopening of the educational, political, and cultural questions. History is made from the questions that revolve around the concept of power, and a specific vision of the world is chosen by interpreting power in one way or another. Thus, Capitini decisively reverses the traditional idea of power by suggesting a real alternative. He does so by opting for a method and a practice of nonviolence that goes far beyond the mere occasion of “weekend peace” (followed by a Monday of an inexorable resumption of war!).

Liberation, however, every liberation, grows and proceeds by addition. This helps us understand the authentic strength of this reversal of power, which, from a weapon of oppression is reborn to a new life in the source of compresence, that is, as an extended sharing of power itself. A choral “can do” has its origin in the clear choice that Capitini makes for *a life of nonviolence*, as recalled by the subtitle of this volume.

All this, the whole reasoning regarding power and the nonviolent struggle in the strain for social justice, emerges with overwhelming evidence on the subject of a closed / open religion. Moreover, it is not by chance that we can read—as Capitini notes in his letter to the archbishop of Perugia Msgr. Parente in October 1958—that “religion must not be division, but addition, addition and continued openness to all, whatever their actions, their opinions, their faith, and the sacraments they have or do not have”. “Addition and continued openness to all” essentially means putting “sociality” [inclusion] next to freedom and actively engaging in a daily liberalsocialism, which becomes “affectionate” in listening to minorities, dissenters, and those exhausted of any time and any latitude.

In my opinion, all of these reasons represent the platform from which the reader is called to identify the relevance and irrelevance of Capitini’s thought. I consider it particularly important that, thanks to the engaging translation by Prof. Jodi L. Sandford, a book like *Opposition and Liberation* can finally pass from hand to hand among our English-speaking friends around the world.

Giuseppe Moscati  
President of the Aldo Capitini Foundation and Studies Center

# INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THE TRANSLATION

JODI L. SANDFORD

The concept of nonviolence is ever more important today. Aldo Capitini's writings and philosophy of noncooperation, nonviolence, and nonmendacity that he developed through his life (1899 - 1968) are still pertinent and frighteningly contemporary. His active contribution towards an educated and informed society, his commitment to fighting fascism, prevarication, and violence in any form should be recognized as the objective foundation for any democratic peoples. Capitini's ideas and approach were considered revolutionary during his lifetime, and today are probably even more so in a society that seems to be deeply divided, afraid, violent, and defensive. He speaks of the liberation and how:

the forces of social conservatism have operated and operate with the impressive means at their disposal to again spread the usual fiction, the cocaine of nationalistic rhetoric, the medieval legends, evasive pictures, false opinions of the order that comes from on high and of the lazy arrogant low, of the omnipresent governmental provisions toward the unworthy plebs, of endless "charity", of the goodness of Rome, etc. (Ch. 9. p. 104-105).

This is just an example of his words that seem significantly applicable in our present-day world. Moreover, it was also evident in the paragraphs where he summarizes the philosophy of the nonviolent:

Borders must be overcome and the word "foreigner" should be considered old-fashioned. Every community lives with an inclusive outlook, so it cannot be too big and is linked to the others through a federal system. If people move, they must not be exterminated, but must be welcomed by keeping structures and programs predisposed in order to make this "openness" possible. (Ch. 12. p. 152)

I cannot insert all my favorite quotes here, but there are many passages that are strikingly relevant today and every day. Hence, the importance of making his writings available in English seemed long overdue.

The project of translating *Opposition and Liberation* has gone through a long gestation. Capitini has a very particular style of writing, together with often invented words, and new philosophical theories that are a true challenge for a translator. It has been difficult to decide how to best communicate his words, when to break down the extremely lengthy sentences (even for Italian), and how to resolve the ambiguity that Italian sometimes creates in an utterance. I have tried to maintain the flow of the Italian and make the English seem natural at the same time. This in itself may seem like an oxymoron, but it was my objective. I have read texts translated into English from Italian that lose the relationship between the two languages. Sometimes the Italian syntax remains underneath the English, and interferes with a proper speed of comprehension making reading slow and laborious. Other times the English is pleasant and fluent, but the Italian origin disappears. I hope to have somehow found a good halfway point, though my decision has been to favor the English. This is because I feel that the “meaning” and the “significance” of the texts needs to be made accessible to the English reader. Comparatively speaking, there are not many English speakers who read Italian, and as becomes visible in the Bibliography included herewith, there are still not many English translations of Capitini.

The difficulty of communicating Capitini’s works and words has been regarded with much diffidence. Duly, I am aware of three glossaries that try to shed light on his lexicon: in English Taurino (2016), which is quite difficult to follow, Cremaschi (2009), which is quite clear, though a brief encyclopedia entry, on the other hand; and Binni & Rossi (2017) in Italian, which includes an appendix with an explanation of Capitini’s choices and short bios of the many people he mentions. Nevertheless, in this brief note I identify some fundamental words of Capitini’s lexicon that seem appropriate to explain. I leave most of the names of the many people he mentions in the text without further explanation feeling that internet searches now allow a reader means to discover those that are of specific interest. The few notes I do provide are inserted because I consider the immediate understanding pertinent for comprehension of the work. I have included the original Italian political party names and book titles in italics with the translation in brackets to facilitate researching details of the specific references. The aim is not to make the book too “heavy” with notes and explanations, but rather to lay out a translation that is accessible to anyone who might want to appreciate and approach Capitini’s nonviolent theory.

First, I would like to explain and illustrate the trio that introduces this volume in Goffredo Fofi’s introduction: *nonviolence*, *nonmendacity*, and

*noncooperation*. I have followed Capitini's practice with these specific terms beginning with "non", and have left them without a hyphen. *Nonviolence* is a very automatic translation, though the meaning for Capitini is different from the typical understanding of the term. For Capitini *nonviolence* is an ideal to be pursued with a belief that violence is so omnipresent that it calls for far-reaching change. The objective of *nonviolence* is to resolve conflict in a manner that does not require violent response or aggressive behavior, though Capitini's nonviolence does require active participation and constant questioning of the status quo. *Noncooperation* translated from "*noncollaborazione*" is important to emphasize, since sometimes it has been erroneously translated as "noncollaboration". It is a term that Capitini had adopted from Gandhi's "Non-cooperation Movement" 1920-1922. Hence, I return to that root though without the hyphen to accentuate the philosophical aspect of the word. *Nonmendacity* is a little more difficult to explain because of the connotations of the term "*menzogna*" in Italian. "*Menzogna*" or "mendacity" is different than *lying*, i.e. not telling the truth. Instead it means "telling lies, especially habitually; dishonest; lying; untruthful". Ergo, there is an aspect of intention and constancy that is implicit in the term. Therefore, I chose to use "mendacity" even though it is not a very common or frequent term in English.

The nonviolent must also be *persuaded*, and be ready to *persuade*. *Persuasion* is another essential Capitinian word. For him it is a path or a process that each individual must follow, it includes *nonacceptance* (another prefixed term with no hyphen) of violence, and the concept of *addition* to the reality of *compresence*, that is to what has already been. Looking at these other terms, Capitini sees each individual's birth as an "addition" (preferred to "adjunction"<sup>1</sup>), as an "enhancement" for all, from which one shall never be precluded from that moment on. In forwarding this agenda the individual may find a way to establish a base for undertaking action towards liberation. As Fofi paraphrases in the premise of this book:

Nevertheless, the "nonacceptance" of the nonviolent (the *nonacceptance* of the scandals of reality and history, the abuse of power of the strong over the

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<sup>1</sup> Baldoli states "the action of liberation proposed by nonviolence is an "adjunction" to the rest of human actions. These actions are pure, authentic, and without condition; they do not hinder the receiving being and they do not seek anything from others. This action is called "adjunction" because a nonviolent action does not aim at demolishing existent institutions or groups. On the contrary, it integrates them with a force from below, resulting in open actions that aim at offering something more to the state of affairs" (2018: 4).

weak, the continuity of death) has been both a signal of rebellion that begins with the individual conscience that needs then to open to others, and to a undertaking of action. It is a rebellion that originates in nothing else than the individual, “irrational”, “religious”, or Capitinianly “religious addition to the opposition”. And it is an undertaking of action that does not defer actuation to a utopia, but requires the whole pure realization of a persuasion and of a method of immediate intervention: a longing, a rule, a struggle, an undertaking. (p. 2)

The undertaking of “religious addition to opposition” requires “openness” (preferable to “opening”, in contrast to closure or “close mindedness”) to all. Persuasion as action and method, necessitates an openness to the dead and the living: humans, animals, plants, and things, in what Capitini recognizes as the “compresence”, or the *One-All*. Capitini says, “from Michelstaedter I highlighted—even during a lecture I gave in Florence—“persuasion” (a term I chose preferring “persuaded” to “believer”, persuaded in the sense of “self-persuaded”, nearly “pervaded”), the anti-rhetoric, a kind of existentialism that could become a supreme practical commitment” (p. 38). He does not see it as a belief, but as a practical act or “religious praxis”.

In the expression “One-All”, *all* is translated from “*tutti*”: also found in a title of an important essay, *La realtà di tutti* [The Reality of All]. Sometimes this has been translated as “Everybody’s Reality”. It is my position that “everybody” is a mistaken choice since it implies people rather than people, animals, things, past, present, future, or the “all” plural that is part of the Capitinian belief in compresence. He also speaks about the “*potere di tutti*” that I translated fittingly with “power of all”.

These ideas are a fundamental part of this “autobiographical” book compiled by Giacchè with Capitini’s original writings. For now let me just say that I have chosen to use *compresence*, without a hyphen (co-presence), for the same reason explained before, and with the intrusive “m” that is similar to the Italian, and also refers directly to the philosophical terminology generally used, rather than the simplified form *copresence*. I have found the three versions of this word translated in different texts on Capitini. “This unity or integrated part of all, their infinite potentiality, their absolute novelty, their ‘purity after’ the finitude and many troubles, this I call compresence” Capitini explains in his *Farewell*, at the end of this book.

Another term that I have opted to use without the hyphen or separation is “Liberal-socialism” for *Liberal-socialismo*, as Capitini did himself when referring to the ideology and movement that he supported and promoted

with Guido Calogero<sup>2</sup> (with whom he dialogued on the “First Manifesto of Liberal-socialism”). Rosselli, on the other hand, used the term *Socialismo Liberale* when referring to the political thought, with the noun adjective couple that requires the translation *Liberal Socialism* based on the separate liberal and socialist ideologies.

Another decision I made in relation to the Italian text was to maintain the formal forms with no contractions, because the text appears in a more formal yet clear and direct register. Moreover, reflecting the times, Capitini refers most often to the people around him, as his fellow students, his colleagues, and his pupils or students with the masculine forms. Of course in Italian the masculine plural may be used as an umbrella term for both male and female. Here it is most likely that he is actually referring to males. I have therefore translated them with “he” and “him”, or “the boys” if that seemed the case. He used expressions like “*great men*” most likely referring to only men, the female version of teacher “*maestra*” rather than the umbrella term “*maestro/i*”, and he speaks of “less high” occupation such as in the phrase “Then along the way someone might settle a little less high. Finding a young woman, and adapting to love a smaller family” (p. 145). Surprisingly he refers to *razza* “race”. These are all concepts and linguistic construals that are dated, misogynist, and racist. I would like to believe that Capitini as an intelligent and sensitive person would not want to seem like that, but I have maintained the original forms nonetheless. I have calqued his invented words in English, staying true to his creative vocabulary, for example: *Catholicizing, reconciliationistic, orientators*.

Another unusual term, “Omnocracy” presumes dialogue among people and the rule thereby of the people through direct participation in civic meetings and engagement. Capitini refers to this approach together with “*dal basso*” which I have translated “from the bottom-up” using “grass-roots” only twice to express a similar concept. On the other hand, the translation of the “*Tu*” with “You” seemed more appropriate than the archaic “Thou” that I have found in other translations of his essays. I believe that “thou” has been used to refer to the religious connotation of the word, but Capitini actually wanted to reject the traditional church and religion. Thus, I do not agree with that choice. See for example, “I believe that in my life I should always unify search and putting my values into effect in balance with the openness to the *you*-all.” (p. 116) and “I see the *you* in all of the current events. And I do not think about my survival at all. I believe that in my religious life I must be open to the immortality of each being, of each *you*

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2 Cf. Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira. 2004. *Democracy and public management reform: building the republican state*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 84; refers to the use of the compound un-hyphenated term.

in the compresence, never stopping at the survival of the self.” (p. 117). The word “you” that is to imply “positing brotherhood among individuals as a starting-point” (cf. Cremaschi 2009) seems more politically correct than “thou”. Capitini often uses the word “*tensione*” that is clearly different than *tension*. It has been a challenge to choose the best specific and partial meaning, such as balance, pressure, anxiety, or strain. This also happened with the word “*orizzonte*”, which could mean perspective, realm, outlook, view, boundary, or limit. My aim has been to maintain as much of the original construal as possible.

Words like “*della sinistra*” I have varied between using “liberals” and “left-wing” depending on what sounded best in the context, using the same approach to “*incontri*” which were sometimes “encounters”, “meetings”, or “assemblies” depending on whether there were many people attending, speaking, or not. Sometimes “*conversazioni*” easily translated to “conversations” refers to a type of social encounter, but on a more private or personal level. It also implies less formal and ongoing verbal exchange on the same matter, whereas “dialogues” can refer to a conversation between two or more persons, but the distinguishing aspect is the objective of reaching an amicable agreement. The word “*interventi*” I usually translated with “speeches”, not “interventions” as the false-friend tends to emerge. Moreover, Capitini speaks often about “*collegamenti*” and “*rete*” translated with “connections”, “network”, and “contacts”, or sometimes “*contatti*” directly with “contacts” or “connections”. Here again it was of utmost importance to maintain the correct collocations, even though they vary across the two languages.

I opted to use the word “struggle” to translate “*lotta*” keeping the implicit idea of ongoing difficulty; and “*laiche*” with “lay”, “laic”, or “secular”, also used for “*mondano*” meaning “of this world”, not “mundane”. I left his concept of “Festa” as a community celebration, figuring that most English speakers now understand the word easily. The “*centri di propulsione energetica*” I translated literally “centers of energetic propulsion” since it is a Capitinian expression, even though in English there are no specific references in a political sense to this active “sociality”. “Sociality” today might mean more basically a type of “inclusion”, “community”, or “society”, though I have preferred to use a calque of the Italian “*socialità*”. Capitini defines sociality as a combination of socialism and liberty. “*Adesione*” importantly becomes “consensus”, not “adhesion”. The term “*corale*” which I translate with “choral” refers to acting as a “choir”—a group of people who combine their separate voices to make one voice. Capitini also uses the term in one of his publication titles.

The last comment I would like to note is the capitalization of words like Fascism, Fascist, when referring to party names, proper names, university courses, and titles, but not to the philosophy in general, e.g., with -ism or anti- affixes. I capitalized the adjective when it was using a person's name, e.g. Capitinian, Mazzinian, and also when there are names of organizations or political parties, e.g. Catholic, Communist.

Aldo Capitini was an Umbrian. He was from Perugia; one of the first city-states in Italy and one of the earliest municipalities to develop democratic representation. He continued to promote this democratic ideal throughout his lifetime. Sometimes people have written that he is from Tuscany, because he worked and studied in Pisa, was jailed in Firenze, and networked with many people in that region. He networked with the many regions across Italy. He remains a fundamental figure in modern political and social sciences as an ideologue of nonviolence, open education, open religion, of the you-all omniscient persuasion. Perhaps because he was anti-fascist, anti-Church, pro-grassroots, vegetarian<sup>3</sup>, and a sensitive self-made man, he has yet to receive proper recognition. As he said of himself:

The fact that I had not joined, nor did I want to join one, any Party left me outside the NCL, then a little at a time outside the Constituent committee, outside a lot of recognition and public initiatives, and also outside national resonance. There was no association behind me to bring my name up to the national level. Therefore, I remained a point of reference for anti-fascism only for the "initiates" of the Opposition period who knew what I had done back then. Furthermore, I kept myself away from everything that was an exaltation of armed Resistance, firm in my idea not to take part even in conferences on the subject. This was because I did not want to criticize what the others had done with so much courage and heroism. Nor did I want to lose that affirmation of a different method, of the dream that Italians could free themselves from Fascism with heroic noncooperation and civil disobedience. That was my duty. (Ch. 7, p. 82)

Aldo Capitini was an inconvenient figure and has regrettably remained outside national and international resonance for too long. He was a strong

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<sup>3</sup> "In 1952 under the impulse of Aldo Capitini, teacher of Moral Philosophy at the University of Perugia, the first organization, the *Società Vegetariana* [Vegetarian Society], was set up. Moving from the belief that human nourishment cannot be based on the death of other living beings, Aldo Capitini started to reflect upon vegetarianism as a choice consequential to his nonviolent engagement." From the International Vegetarian Union - History of Vegetarianism. <https://ivu.org/history/societies/italy.html>. Last accessed July 2018.

anti-fascist and the among the first to be a conscientious objector and vegetarian—starting the Vegetarian Society of Italy. He was among the first to promote Gandhi and nonviolence in Italy—also through the March for Peace and the Brotherhood of Peoples from Perugia to Assisi. Likewise, he was an active promoter of open education. His multifaceted contribution to contemporary society has nevertheless often been overshadowed. He was in close contact with many well-known people of the times with whom he worked on numerous publications and political theory: Benedetto Croce, Guido Calogero, and Norberto Bobbio, to mention a few. Yet he has often been relegated to brief mention and not translated into other languages. Finally, more frequent studies of his work have been published in the past several years. It is my hope that this translation will help disseminate the work of this extraordinary individual.

I would like to acknowledge that this translation has been possible with the support of my research funds from the University of Perugia. My gratitude goes to Gabriele De Veris of the Biblioteca Comunale San Matteo degli Armeni, where the Capitini collection is maintained, to Giuseppe Moscati, the President of the Aldo Capitini Foundation and Studies Center, and Piergiorgio Giacchè for their encouragement. My infinite appreciation goes to Sara Sandford in primis, to Alix Stock, Liam Boyle, and Barbara Sandford for their thoughtful comments and corrections.

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**ALDO CAPITINI**

**OPPOSITION AND LIBERATION:  
A LIFE IN NONVIOLENCE**

**EDITED BY PIERGIORGIO GIACCHÈ**

**TRANSLATION BY JODI SANDFORD**

# ONCE AGAIN WITH CAPITINI

GOFFREDO FOFI

FOR “LO STRANIERO” PUBLISHING

Nonviolence, nonmendacity<sup>1</sup>, noncooperation. From Gandhi to Capitini, to current movements, these are three affirmations of another way to understand our responsible participation in history as an individual, in a group, or collectively; another way to understand “politics”, another way to understand the struggle for social justice that implies respect for life—respect for nature. These three words have elicited mistrust, skepticism, and rejection in those who had to justify the inequalities that any power causes, and in those liberals who believed in the inevitable domination and supremacy of strength. The nonviolent path has not been easy and its defeats have been particularly bitter for those who invested in it hopes of immediate and lasting victories. Nevertheless, the “nonacceptance” of the nonviolent (the nonacceptance of the scandals of reality and history, the abuse of power of the strong over the weak, the continuity of death) has been both a signal of rebellion that begins with the individual conscience which needs then to open to others and to an undertaking of action. It is a rebellion that originates in nothing else than the individual, “irrational”, “religious”, or Capitinianly “religious addition to the opposition”. It is an undertaking of action that does not defer actuation to a utopia, but requires the whole pure realization of a persuasion and of a method of immediate intervention: a longing, a rule, a struggle, an undertaking.

Sure, it is continually necessary to start over again, and today the proposal of nonviolence may appear more fragile than ever faced with the immeasurable capabilities that technology has put at the disposal of the powerful. Sometimes it may even deserve the accusation of those like Günther Anders: Considering the possibility that power has to destroy almost every living being on our planet, the nonviolent limit themselves to

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1 See Soloviev, V. S. 2009. *Freedom, Faith, and Dogma: Essays*. New York: SUNY Press. <https://charterforcompassion.org/aldo-capitini-advocate-of-non-violence>; and Zimmerman, Michael J. 2014. *Ignorance and Moral Obligation*. Oxford: OUP.

parades, to “happenings”, with no effect on the actual choices made by those who brandish the instruments of power or dispense them to their will and liking. It would be senseless to be satisfied just because there are so many of us to demonstrate, even millions, when facing the coercion, the forced “public” deadlines, the attacks and the abuse of power.

Beyond the satisfaction of identifying with many, the urgency of the real impact should be clear. Every action should stop that chance of destruction. That is what Gandhi and Capitini saw in their lives as already possible (the atomic bomb!) though not yet so totally pressing and overwhelming. The leaders of the current movements often seem to have little in common with the “persuaded” Capitinians. Instead they have a lot in common with the “rhetoricians” who are intermediaries of a steady return or mandate to ancient forms of political representation. Current movements seem to be inefficient in arresting evil and evidently sometimes even in arresting corruption.

Starting from Capitini’s teachings, it is necessary to insist on the radical elements of his proposals and finally on the necessity of actively and concretely demonstrating the highest acceptance of individual and collective responsibilities—in the creation, fulfillment, and proposal of exemplary nonviolent action.

Nonmendacity and noncooperation (which is an aspect of civil disobedience) are as important as the individual practice of nonviolence or as the manifest declaration of nonviolence in a moment of particular disturbance in international relations or in domestic politics; which is to say almost always, if not always. Even a mass demonstration may appear to be—Anders criticism is right—a superfluous outlet that lacks depth and serves only to help us feel “rhetorically” good, but it does not change the state of things in any way.

It is likely that the sensation of impotence we often feel nowadays when facing the hardness of life, the disparity of living conditions, the arrogance of power, the drive of death in society is an ineliminable certainty. We feel it is too late in the progression of events for it to still be possible to change the course of the world. Nowadays, we surely have to be more pessimistic than in the past, in the years of Capitini. In spite of this, even when we see only desperation within or around ourselves, our nonacceptance of the scandals of reality and history is the breaking point of an order that is understood as immutable, of a decline that is understood as irreversible. The signal of the Capitinian persuasion is in the need of “dignity of consciousness” and the response to our sense of duty that we know we have towards others, towards those who do not know or do not have our same freedom to respond, towards those who suffer, towards the oppressed,

towards the dead, towards animals and plants, towards those who are not born yet, towards everything that is living, and will live or may live and can perish from the power of violence, and from poverty and the imprecision of our reactions.

We should draw a lesson from Capitini, from his life and thoughts of coherence and radicalism, which nowadays are finally accepted as a clear measure and a radical path within a culture (both Catholic and secular, even Communist ...) intentionally foreign and hostile to him.

## INTRODUCTION

PIERGIORGIO GIACCHÈ

Action and thought. When you tell the story of somebody's life it is more correct to reverse the Mazzinian sequence. And this is not because action comes first, rashly and without reflecting, but because it occurs really and truly, and because—at least in the ordinary life of a few extraordinary people—the conception of an idea is generated as an act. Few people have a coherent enough life to follow their words with action, or rather to combine them in their own manner of actions. In their cases, life truly amounts to their works, which do not differ from the first meaning of the term: productive or operative activity. In their cases in the end even the inherited assets of precious works, which are sometimes claimed to be eternal, continue to be worth less than how these people spent their lives on the earth. These people can be called “persuaded” and can be considered “compresent”. Aldo Capitini would have called and considered them in this way. He acted and lived in such a way as to identify himself with this definition and this dimension.

This book does not want to rewrite the story of Aldo Capitini, but it wants to gather information about his life directly from his writings, and particularly from those that report or express his actions directly. We entitled this book *Opposition and Liberation* because it seems that such actions cannot be classified other than in the indissoluble bond between these two terms. Even this time their sequence means nothing: it does not refer to the logic that calls for a struggle first and then a victory. There is neither a before nor an after for it. Opposition that is not liberation in itself is not significant. There is no liberation which frees itself from the duty to oppose.

There are two explicitly autobiographical writings by Aldo Capitini. The first is a book meant for the anti-fascist education of young people, where the author narrates his own lifetime and activities up to 1944. The second *Attraverso due terzi di secolo* [Through Two-thirds of the Century] is a short self-portrait written with the need of recapitulating the progression of his work, his encounters, and his ideas after two-thirds of a century.

Actually, *Antifascismo tra i giovani* [Anti-fascism Among Young People] had been thought of and written to replace a more complex and “open” undertaking, that did not see the light of day. It was a book entitled *Perchè abbiamo contrastato il Fascismo* [Why We Opposed Fascism], where the intent was to publish “about a hundred declarations of anti-fascists from different currents, conditions, and regions”, which were dedicated “to the young, and to the youngest of Italy”. Capitini had been trying to encourage and collect declarations from anti-fascist acquaintances and friends since 1952 for this reason. He recommended that they avoid any too insistent autobiographical accounts, but on the contrary, they needed to narrate “the cause that led each of us to anti-fascism, how each of us saw the historical situation in which we lived and the ideas that brought us to contrast [the regime]”. But after a lengthy period of solicitation and delay he put together about fifty extremely significant declarations (if you consider the influential names, and, above all, the great majority of “heretics” and people outside political parties), an incomprehensible about-face by the publisher Feltrinelli made this work a waste of time and, what is more, most of the collected declarations were later lost.

Probably the book *Anti-fascism Among Young People* is autobiographical by force not by choice, with the aim to compensate for a change of plan and, notwithstanding, to not relinquish the duty of passing on an anti-fascist tradition to the new generations. On the other hand, the compendium of his lifetime and ideas entitled *Through Two-thirds of the Century* became, we cannot say with how much foresight, something more, and something different from a short memoir and autobiographical musings. It replaced and assumed the sense of a long epigraph, or of a concise (for this reason also admirable) spiritual testament, especially considering that Capitini died only a few months after he finished writing it.

But if the properly autobiographical texts can therefore have been motivated or recognized in a different way from a suitable classic and often gratifying “autobiography”, it is also true that often, or nearly always, Capitini’s writings are subjective. They consider and are very often, or almost always, based on personal life events. The ideas are recounted like discoveries, concretely described as they arise from the debate and from the ongoing struggle. They are tied up in an inseparable way to the initiatives that realized them, and wed to the people encountered by the author and to the events he experienced. It is not that Capitini had no desire or relish to talk about himself, but it is clear that it was not a gratifying choice. It stemmed instead from the necessity to defend himself, or the duty of explaining himself. Or rather, it stemmed from his own idealistic position

and moral belief that provoked and imposed a continuous use of the first person—a constant attention to his own direct contacts and surroundings.

Capitini, therefore, reveals and precisely shows us a protagonism (being the first person to act) that is totally introverted and even ignorant of the display. It is an exactly opposite testimony to the passiveness and the ingenuous voyeurism which has long since tainted the meaning of the word “testimony”. The moral duty of active participation is complete only when one assumes all responsibility for what one affirms, only when one is (or has already been) the living proof of what one states. Maybe, in the same way, Capitinian refusal of historicism has also indirectly led to the validation of subjective memory. This is, after all, because life is beyond and better than history (and also farther ahead and superior. Life or “the reality of all” is even beyond and better than the history of everybody or of “Someone”). In short, the more Capitini describes and writes about himself, the more believable and spotless is what he gradually says about reality and about people’s lives. Thus, he reveals himself, or better offers himself as a true protagonist, and an authentic testimony of the historical, political, and social period that he experiences.

If only this should emerge from the collection of writings we are proposing, it would be a more than a satisfactory result for a publishing proposal that stems from the most simple and modest motivation, naturally equal to more useful and ambitious objectives. That is, to re-present an anthology of memories and speeches that follow the density and the truth of a “life story”, that may serve to briefly remember the life of “*great men*”—just like they told us in school—and may serve as “an example”. Often this can be more significant and more effective than the republication of their best works.

This is a book that collects and composes the writings of Capitini that have been published in another form and for different purposes. It aims to be a way to make *him* tell his life once again and more extensively. Yet, as far as the editing and the limits of this work are concerned there is perhaps something to say about the difficulties that we encountered in working on it and some foreseeable problems with the readers’ approval. The autobiographical angle and references in his writings were clear. It was simple to find speeches, fragments, and chronologically ordered ideas (sometimes stylistically consistent with our premise to make them into a fluent life story). Still, we found it difficult to let Capitini recount himself. It meant incessant work and total “tension” and attention to reality.

We did not think we could supersede the limits and risks of biographies written by a third party: to reach greater degrees of completeness and

complexity, that is, to avoid the bias and judgment even when unintentional of those who choose only some facts or inevitably emphasize certain aspects of Capitini's total experience. On the contrary, we want these "autobiographical" pages to be oriented towards a choice of *partiality* and *reduction*: a reduction that makes the story of his life accessible to a wider public than his occasional and jealous friends and his few and learned connoisseurs. At the same time we sought a partiality that may be able to jostle the patronizing and the overly widespread and uninformed curiosity of the many impromptu supporters or superficial beneficiaries. It is a reduction that imitates at least the synthesis or the simplicity of which Aldo Capitini was convinced and capable. And it is even a double bias, because it undeniably and faithfully follows some of his choices, runs through some of his radicalisms and certain moral and ideal assertions, which obviously also make our own choices materialize.

Certainly, what pushes and convinces us is to do our best to communicate a tradition, even if an operation like this means making selections, cuts, assertions, that for some may seem betrayal. After all the posthumous reconstitution of an autobiography is naturally not authentic, but it is based on and uses passages, letters, commentaries of documented authenticity: some incompleteness cannot rightly be considered "unfaithfulness". Some highlighting cannot mean interpretation, even if we say this not to hide our work behind *his* words, but on the contrary to reveal and show the freedom we have taken and perhaps to denounce its limits.

The two openly autobiographical works naturally provide the basis of this collection that was founded, however, to complete the story of the years, of the missing or more neglected episodes in those pages. They are parts that are very present and studied in detail in other books, pamphlets, and articles in Capitini's vast production.

*Antifascismo tra i giovani*, essentially re-presented here, allows us to easily reach 1944; after Liberation the story becomes more fragmentary and, maybe, more arbitrary and concise. This is also because it must, and wants to, deal with a text that in quantity and in quality wished to remain within the limits and the tasks of dissemination (and also for this reason it intentionally sacrificed the notes, both the author's original ones and even the commentary and explanatory ones). Yet Capitini's work after Fascism was more intense and varied—although equally feverish. In those years it was finally possible to know, to conceive, and to do much more—everything that had been postponed or repressed, when freedom or socialism were not yet utopias, only crime against opinion.

The commitments, the initiatives, and the meetings in public and private life had increased from the immediate post-war period. The material sensation of “the all”, the tangible possibility of the “celebration”, had perhaps concretely overlapped their shining but still detached intuition. The tetralogy was completed in 1944 with *La realtà di tutti* [The Reality of All], which disclosed his philosophical thoughts about the *objectives* of a religious reform, his history—also the struggle. It finally allowed Capitini to face the problem of the *means*, to verify his thoughts in concrete situations, and to combine them into varied possibilities of action. So, it was necessary for us—even if in the limits of a small volume that is not certainly exhaustive—to recall the stages and the most significant encounters in this action, without forgetting his constant branching out and comparison with the roots of his ideas and choices. On the contrary, we can say that during the fifties and the sixties this activity had made his ideas ever more coherent and his choices ever more radical. It was necessary in the end to reach 1968, the year of his death, but also, of course, of the renewal of a particular attention and hope towards young people that, after all, had always been present in Capitini the pedagogue, the political and religious man.

His relationship with religion is precisely the crucial problem for us. We would not want this fundamental component of his whole ideal “experience”, which is necessarily bound to facts, situations, and individuals, to seem of secondary importance or leave it faintly in the background of his “life story”.

This meant then that—first and above all—it was necessary to remind the reader of the path and the sense of a “religious life” and to follow a series of events and writings (that is to choose a series of texts) along with which the aspects and the developments of Aldo Capitini’s work and religious thoughts would remain attached and evident. In addition we are dedicated to respecting his true *autobiographical* point of view, because there is no doubt about his constant concern to demonstrate the deep ties between *his* religion and any other layer of interest and action, [which ranged] from anti-fascism to the Liberal-socialist Movement, from the intense urban and national political life in the years of the Second World War to the peace initiatives, from university teaching to the analysis of many phenomena and to the attention towards every kind of social unrest.

The cultural and social climate of his (and of our) time and the political vice of many of his (and our) contemporaries have too often encouraged a reading and an application of Aldo Capitini (and of his works) that kept the political vision and engagement separate from the religious. Many episodes, comments, and evaluations attest how his “open” religion was the most irksome and stodgy thing to approve or even to understand. The right, the

Catholic center, and the Marxist and non-Marxist left, all and each mocked, opposed, ousted, and sometimes repeatedly ridiculed his behavior and more often the claim of the centrality of religion. The great number of people who now accept the centrality of religion as an ideal heritage and as Capitini's personal definition still risk misunderstanding the space and the sense. Capitini, through the quest of an "open" religion, is more than anything a "persuaded" individual that discovers the need of a political addition to religion, rather than a political activist who theorizes a *religious addition to opposition*.

To be truly religious you must pass through [the experience] of public life. [...] If you pass from a private life to a religious life, without passing through a public life, you risk living religion in a utilitarian way, as a superstition.

This is Capitini's main concern and the motivation of his political and social commitment. This is the thread, the direction towards which his life was directed and with which it continues to explain itself.

We must not let ourselves be distracted by the great evidence of relevance and utility of Capitini's thought that during the last third of the century and the first tragic years of the new millennium has gradually spread and has been silently effective. At least let us not be distracted to the point that we lose the thread and the sense of his life that we have gathered in this not very orthodox "autobiography", so that it may be understandable and justifiable in its uniqueness and exemplarity. Such a different life, "an addition" to the history and the culture of our times, reveals and explains many aspects that have been involuntarily undervalued and hidden. It is able by itself—really in its own small way—to contradict the convenient secular and logical versions to which everyone hurriedly grew attached.

We have used two extracts to frame his story, one entitled *Una domanda* [A Question] and *Un congedo* [A Farewell], passages which reveal, maybe more than others, a lucid vision of his own uniqueness, and also of his own solitude. The fact is that in many other writings, on many other occasions, the awareness and the condemnation of solitude (never isolation, mind you) clearly or indirectly emerges. It is a solitude in actions and ideas, even though in a web of close friendships, in an uninterrupted fabric of acquaintances and trusting exchanges. It is a solitude that is more quiet than bitter, more verified than deplored, and however balanced together with lack of effectiveness and success of what had instead been (and claimed as) tireless activity, intense commitment, and a complex and complete undertaking.

It could not have been otherwise for a nonviolent person who went through the age of armed resistance, a vegetarian who lived through periods of general destitution, and even worse, a person who found a renewed well-