Obituary

Massimo Rosati

Durkheimian studies around the world have suffered a great loss, a totally unexpected tragic one, in the early death of Massimo Rosati. Here was a formidable, up-and-coming Italian scholar, whose work was much influenced by Durkheim and of whom he was a notable interpreter. Now, at the age of forty-four, he has died.

Massimo Rossati was born in Pescara in 1969 and lived in Rome most of his life until his death on 30 January 2014. His mother died when he was thirteen, and he also lost his father not long afterwards. He attended a classical *liceo* in Rome from 1983 to 1988 and hoped to become a veterinary surgeon. He was then persuaded to study sociology and fell in love with it when he attended the University of Rome, La Sapienza. For the dissertation required as part of his studies there, Massimo decided to write on Habermas's theory of communicative action under the direction of Alessandro Ferrara. Rated a brilliant piece of writing, it became the first monograph on the subject. In 1998 he studied for a Ph.D. at the University of Florence. He then obtained posts at the Universities of Perugia and Salerno, lecturing in sociology. In 2008 he returned to Rome, at the University of Tor Vergata. Shortly before he died, he had become the youngest sociologist in Italy to obtain the newly established 'habilitation' as a full professor.

Massimo was a good linguist who had a mastery of English, French and modern Hebrew. This commitment to studying Hebrew was connected with his personal interest in Judaism. He was brought up in a Catholic milieu but never really embraced it. Even if not an adherent, he felt particularly related to Judaism through building up understanding of its beliefs and practices, and once observed that this allowed him to have a deeper perception of the religion's role in everyday life.

Besides his work in Italian, he also wrote for British publishers. In one of his early projects, he coedited with Bill Pickering, and contributed to, *Suffering and Evil: The Durkheimian Legacy*, a collection that appeared in 2008. Other publications in English followed, notably, *Ritual and the Sacred: A Neo-Durkheimian Analysis of Politics, Religion and the Self*, which came out in 2009, and *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies*, a book

of essays by various authors that he compiled with Christiva Stoecki and that came out in 2012. In Italy he was best known for *Solidarietà e sacro: secolarizzazione e persistenza della religione nel discorso sociologico della modernità*, a study he published in 2002, and for his new edition, complete with an up-to-date, scholarly introduction, of the Italian translation of Durkheim's *Les Formes élémentaires*, which appeared in 2005 and again in 2013.

His last book was on Turkey and how it faced modern trends in religion. The text, *The Making of a Postsecular Society: The Turkish Laboratory*, had taken him several years to write and was on the point of being handed over to the publishers at the time of his death. He was bound to Turkey for many reasons. One of them was his admiration for a journalist, Hrant Dink, who fought for peace throughout his life and who was brutally assassinated in 2007. Massimo, during his last visit to Istanbul in 2014 and when about to conclude his book, said this was his personal fight with heart and computer to bring about peace and respect among religions. At that time he was preparing yet another work, on the relation of the sociology of religion and psychoanalysis. Here Durkheimian theory was a key reference, especially in bringing out the role played by the sacred – above all through ritual – and its many implications for contemporary secular societies.

His popularity was as much among students as it was among teachers. After being moved by one of his lectures, a student was heard to remark, 'I want to be like him'. Massimo had a warm, charming character, often lacking in the academic world. No one ever seems to have spoken depreciatingly of him.

He started a group for the mutual understanding of the sociology of religion and the Durkheimian school, called the Centre for the Study of Political and Religious Institutions on Postsecular Societies that became known as CSPS. His contact and collaboration with members of the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies began at a conference on Durkheim in Crete in 2004. Later, he found a warm reception in Brazil at another international conference in Porto Alegre, and became closely associated with the Brazilian Centre for Durkheimian Studies. He was also a visitor to Princeton and Yale.

He worked extremely hard and was generally at his desk by 4:30 a.m. each day. He tried to find enough time to work and to take care of the family to which he was devoted. Massimo was married to Barbara, who had studied sociology. They had one child, a daughter, Anna, now aged fourteen.

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