

Year 2025

Course: Recognising oneself
The Statutes: a path and a mirror

Saturday, January 11, 2025

Lesson 1

Renata Simon, Francisco Canzani

Maria Voce

Introduction

Francisco Canzani

I am a big fan of the UPM because it is the only formation agency of the Movement that reaches all over the world. It is fundamental especially for those places where there are few people who belong to the Work of Mary and there are few people who can help us with formation. Over these years we have truly seen that the UPM is a special forum for transmitting basic, simple but profound content, which truly benefits everyone, from the first to the last member of the Work of Mary.

Renata Simon

We can ask ourselves why is this year's topic on the Statutes: what do the Statutes have to do with the UPM? You know that in a little over a year, in 2026, the General Assembly of the Work of Mary will take place and we must prepare ourselves well for this event, because this General Assembly is the most important governing body of the entire Movement. Therefore, a first answer as to why we have chosen this topic is: to know our Movement well as described in the Statutes and to be well prepared for the General Assembly. Margaret is very keen on this. Over the years she has realised that there is little or insufficient understanding of our Statutes. Today a key word is the word participation in all the important processes, so every participant of the Work of Mary, i.e. every person belonging to the Movement, is called upon to actively participate in this event of the Assembly in his or her own role; and this requires adequate knowledge. But there is also another, deeper reason: it is now 17 years since Chiara's departure for heaven, and there has been a process of reorganisation, also of actualisation, as we say; and multiple paths have been pursued, and during these paths two basic questions emerge: who are we and where are we going? The question who we are, leads us to our identity, as the Work of Mary, to our deepest identity, which is in the midst of all these processes of adaptation, even of enculturation or transformation that has to emerge. That is, our identity gives us a particular physiognomy, different from other institutions and therefore, we must admit, also with humility, it is a physiognomy that is limited. We will therefore not be called upon to launch ourselves on all fronts, if there are specialists better equipped for this than we are. Chiara herself described the General Statutes as the Movement's identity card. We can also say that the Statutes are a little like what a Constitution is for a country. Every new government must also mirror itself in the Constitution, even in the re-structuring processes it undertakes, and always look at them and see whether they are reflected in the Constitution. Regarding these

changes, even possibly of a constitution, there is a special assessment.

Francisco Canzani

The title of this year's course has two meanings, referring to two images: one is that of the mirror. To recognise oneself in front of a mirror: the Statutes are like the mirror of our lives. Recognising oneself and probably also adjusting one's tie a little, combing one's hair better, that is, trying to see in that image the things in which we can improve. Then recognising oneself means getting to know oneself again, that is, getting to know a reality that we know only partially, but which needs to be deepened. And this going into depth will be done in 5 lessons, following a path that has a whole inner coherence, from the Gospel to the rule. The Gospel is our first rule, but then, in our case, there are also the rules, the Statutes. Then the process that the Church has followed in understanding how we can apply the Gospel in particular contexts, according to specific charisms, and how this process has been lived out in our charism. What is the history of our Statutes? How did we come to these Statutes that we have now? And what is the path that Chiara and the first members of the Movement, but not only them, all the communities and the Movement in the world, have taken. This journey of the Church does not only include us, but there are many others... What are the experiences of others, what are their paths. Then there's a very important lesson on the rule and freedom or rules and freedom; that is, in what sense rules do not enslave us but rather make us free. And lastly, some keys to reading our statutes. How can we learn to read them? Knowing that they have a legal language that is not accessible to everyone, but the course will help us to understand some key ideas, I repeat, that it will help us all to be able to get hold of them the statutes, in our hands, to read them and understand them.

Renata Simon

What do we expect then from this UPM course? Undoubtedly, as already mentioned, a deeper knowledge of who we are and consequently where we want to go, and what characterises us as a Movement compared to other organisations and movements. And then, also with this greater knowledge, to know how to be well integrated in the synodal path that the Catholic Church is undertaking. Moreover, this I think will also help us to have a greater capacity for discernment with respect to our fields of action and commitment on behalf of the people around us. And finally, perhaps a new gratitude for the Charism and its incarnation in this Movement will also re-emerge. And perhaps even a renewed passion to commit ourselves to its mission: "that all may be one".

Maria Voce, Emmaus

I wanted to ask you, you who lived/since you were in close contact with Chiara when she was drawing up the statutes, what recommendations would you give us to approach them in the right way and to get to know these statutes of ours?

So, you want to get to know the statutes? The first thing I would say to you is hold them in your hands. Take this precious little book - precious precisely because it contains the statutes - and look at it. Start looking at it from the cover. Look at this golden line that goes all around the cover, for Chiara this indicated how precious these texts were.

Read them. Start reading them, read them while praying to the Holy Spirit, but I would say especially listening to the Holy Spirit.

He alone can enable you to discover the light that is in them, and He will help you. And if you can, when you can, read them together with someone else, so that you can have Jesus in the midst. Read

them with Jesus in the midst! When you open them what do you find? First you find the decrees of approval that indicate the insertion of the statutes in the Church. These decrees ensure that the statutes remain, that they may remain alive forever. And then straight away, is what I would say is the most precious thing: the premise to every other rule, and this is something that I would like to read with you. It says: “Mutual and constant love which makes unity possible and brings the presence of Jesus among all, is, for those who are part of the Work of Mary, the basis for their life... It is the norm of norms, the premise to every other rule.” It is signed by Chiara, Chiara Lubich. And to me it seems so beautiful because first of all it is the premise of every other rule, so no other rules are valid unless there is this premise.

And then Chiara emphasises the norm of norms, so it is the norm that is the basis of the statutes. This norm is mutual and constant love. That is, if there is no constant mutual love even the statutes are a meaningless document, they are worthless. And if, for us, what we learn from reading them, and of course especially living them is not constant mutual love, then the statutes are a meaningless document.

And if the statutes die, the Work of Mary dies, so they cannot die.

And I wanted to ask you if you have another word in your heart that you would say to someone who has never read the statutes, maybe because they don't feel attracted by a text that they may think is too juridical.

Yes, I understand this. I too have never been attracted by what is just juridical and certainly neither was Chiara. With Chiara we therefore tried to understand from the statutes, the possibility - this is the meaning of the statutes and the value of the statutes, - to understand the possibility of being guided, led by the hand so that we can incarnate, actualise, deepen the charism. And so, if we discover this, we could meet the needs of humanity of today and always, as Chiara would. When I speak of humanity, I am of course referring to the whole of humanity.

I am referring to humanity in the widest sense, in which there is also the Church, the churches, the dialogues and everyone, everyone, as Pope Francis has recently continued saying. That is, needs change, they change from time to time, they always change with the times. The charism, if lived, enlightens us so that we can respond to the needs of every age. So just think how very precious the statutes are, if they have this capacity. And therefore, they are immortal, immortal, as long as God wants the charism to continue working, that is, always. So, let's go ahead then, together.

Saturday, January 11, 2025

Lesson 1

Lucia Abignente, Fabio Ciardi, Adriana Cosseddu

Leave only the Gospel

First of all, tell us one article that is particularly close to your heart.

Lucia Abignente

I would definitely say the Premise of the Statutes, because it is the foundation, it is the basis of our life, every aspect is expressed there. And one thing seems very significant to me: the content of this premise was present in a form that sometimes was implicit in the rules of the 1950s, but it was always present. Chiara, in the recent Statutes, wanted to put her signature at the end of this premise. A significant fact that also confirms what she was telling us in her last few years: “What legacy am I leaving you? I am leaving you Jesus in the midst, the fruit of this Marian charism.” And so, we can understand this choice even more and she reflected upon it. It's not a choice made by chance, which she also expressed in the most recent Statutes. She wanted to give a different order to the points of the spirituality, as can be seen in Article 8, where at the end she spoke of Jesus in the midst. There she says that Jesus in the midst is the starting point, a reality that is always present in the journey of those who belong to the Movement, and it is especially the point of arrival. Therefore, it's truly the beginning, and the premise is a constant presence, and is *always* a light, for the Movement today, just as it was at that time for Chiara and throughout the years, and a light for the future too.

Thank you, Lucia, but let us look together more deeply into the understanding of these Statutes and of our history. In fact, the Church has always been enriched by different charisms. But then how does Chiara's charism of unity fit specifically into this journey?

Lucia Abignente

Yes, charisms are truly gifts from God, special, providential gifts from God, which very often truly amaze us because we don't really expect them, and they even give life a new direction. God accompanies the Church's journey, he accompanies the journey of humanity, he enters history through these gifts of his. And it is no coincidence that this light-filled discovery of Jesus' testament which Chiara made with her first companions, has the experience of war as its backdrop. Precisely in that agonizing context of division, almost paradoxically they chose Jesus' testament as the “only point of reference for their lives”. [That's how they put it.]

In the gift given by God to Chiara, the Church, after studying it in depth, recognised it as a charism. So you are asking, but how does this charism fit into the broader picture?

I think all of us who participate in the UPM course have at least once come across that very significant page, in which Chiara describes - and one could say, contemplates - the flowering of the charism over the centuries. And she speaks of them, as Christ unfolded over the ages. She says: “Each family, or order, is the ‘incarnation’, so to speak, of an expression of Jesus, of one of the aspects or facts of his life, of one of his sufferings, of one of his words.” Therefore, one and the same root unites all the charisms: it is the Gospel based root. And the word that God wanted to entrust to Chiara is unity. Article 4 of the Statutes says it very clearly. So, let's read it: “The Work of Mary, because of its special bond with Mary Most Holy and its similarity to the Church, contributes to re-establish full and visible communion between the Churches and ecclesial communities and to direct all humanity to Christ

through the fulfilment of universal fraternity. Unity, the Movement's defining characteristic, imbues all of its spirit, goals, structure and governance." It is beautiful to see how, even in a single article, the legal text expresses the charism completely, it gives us that broad horizon that looks towards humanity and it also speaks of universal fraternity.

Unity, we know, first and foremost is a gift from God and is also a well-known characteristic of the Church. So, can we say, it is not the prerogative or the monopoly of a single group in the Church? No, absolutely not. And here it seems to me that the word "contributes" in article four, "the Work of Mary contributes", expresses it well because it says that the Work of Mary is not alone, but corresponds to the gift it has received by making this contribution.

And in what sense does it speak of something new? Let's go right back to the origins of the Movement. We know that, in an experience that is in fact common to all founders, the Spirit emphasises certain words, and so it was also for Chiara. The Spirit emphasised it so strongly, that she told us: the discovery of God Love is new, new the discovery of the Gospel, new the discovery even of Jesus forsaken, that was truly new! Also new is the understanding and the drive to live for unity. All accompanied by a light to which Chiara has given the name of ideal with a capital I.

At the same time, we also state that there is nothing new. We remember when Chiara said: we just want to be Christians. She also had a certain reluctance when the archbishop asked for a juridical explanation that later gave rise to the statute of 1947. Then, it was already called a statute, although it was "Statute of the Focolares of Charity, Apostles of Unity". But the archbishop had seen something new, albeit in embryo, in what was being born. And Chiara responded, out of obedience.

So how are we to understand this apparent contradiction? I think it is precisely the confirmation of an authentic charism. Why? A charism is invariably the bearer of something new, but it is grafted into the history of the Church, and into Tradition. So, yes, nothing new but also everything new, just as the Gospel is always new, and the Spirit reminds us of this with his breath. It is not by chance that Chiara's charism arrived through a breath of the Spirit precisely in the years preceding the Second Vatican Council and the rediscovery of the Church as communion. So, we can understand the wisdom in Chiara's insistence on always reminding us that if we have to define the charism in one word, that word is "unity". Unity expresses the gift that God has conferred on the Movement, compared to the gifts with which he has enriched the Church over the centuries. "Unity," Chiara said, "is our specific vocation, unity is what characterises the Movement, unity and not other ideas or words that may, in some way, express other divine and splendid ways of going to God." In unity, the word that sums up the Movement, Chiara sees enclosed the specific characteristic of the charism and therefore also its newness.

So unity is a gift of God and it's also our specific vocation. So what is asked of us? What is our contribution?

Lucia Abignente

Above all, I think that we should become aware of this specific gift of the charism. And in this sense, it seems so significant to me, so full of light, that in point no. 11 of a Church document, that is a bit old but still relevant, called *Mutuae Relationes*, it says that "the very charism of the founders appears as 'an experience of the Spirit,' transmitted to their disciples, to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth."

We cannot deny that Chiara, precisely because of her specific charism, transmitted to all of us the experience she lived in the different moments of her life. Now it is up to us *to live, safeguard, deepen and constantly develop* the charism that God let us encounter and that we then welcomed. These verbs used, as well as the adverb *constantly*, point to a demanding and wonderful programme to

which we are all called, and one could pause for a long time to reflect on it, and in part we have done so. I think they are very precious verbs also in this UPM year that we are beginning, because they help us to enter into the reality of the Statutes, on tiptoe, grasping with gratitude both their beauty (truly there are many people outside the movement who tell us, and how complete the Statutes are), but also understanding how much the juridical expresses the charism and how the Statutes give us the physiognomy of an ecclesial reality that Chiara was able to generate in faithfulness to God.

I love history, I think you know that? And I think that nothing like the path she suffered up to the definitive Statutes - which were preceded by 7 rules - testifies how authentic Chiara's commitment was: to follow the "score written in heaven" to then play that music on earth, that is, to bring the movement to fruition also in its structure, according to God's plan.

It is up to us, to those who will come after us, to know and understand all this, to deepen it always more, and *to constantly develop* the Movement in harmony with what Chiara has done.

In these days I was re-reading a letter written by Chiara, when she was 28 years old, in 1948, to a religious, Father Bonaventura, the one whom she called her "first religious son"; he had asked her for some detailed information about the Movement. Chiara replied, "It would take volumes. When God works, what wonders come forth from his hands." Recalling that exhortation of St Catherine, whom she loved so much, "Do not be satisfied with little things, because God wants great things!" Chiara says, "Let's allow him to operate. May we never impede his omnipotence with the narrow-mindedness of 'our' views. Our only book - she underlined, only - is the Gospel. In particular, it's the prayer of Jesus addressed to the Father. ... He knows that we have no other desire than to actualize His Testament as the best expression of our love for Him. He'll do it through us. We're always carrying out the details of this wonderful design – already then she is speaking of God's plan! – From the next life we'll see what we've accomplished. And it shall be the beginning of a Unity that will have to tie in everyone with the sweet bond of love." She continues, "We begin the work here below. We'll continue it there above through those who will follow us."

So, she is also speaking of us! So, it is up to us to continue it *constantly* in communion with her.

Is there one article in the Statutes that you have particularly at heart?

Padre Fabio Ciardi

Article number 64. The choice is very personal, because it begins by quoting my Word of Life. "God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom."

It's an article about Wisdom. Wisdom is neither study, nor science nor culture. Wisdom is precisely entering into God and contemplating God, savouring God, living of God.

And this article says that to have Wisdom, you practically need to live all the spirituality. In fact, in just a few lines the whole spirituality is explained, because it begins by saying, that first of all, we must ask for Wisdom through prayer (therefore this already places you in God and leads you to choose God). Then it says that to have Wisdom you must live all the words of Jesus. So, here we have the Word of life which is central to the spirituality.

Living the word of life, living the will of God.

Not only this, but to have Wisdom you must follow Jesus right to the end, taking up his cross every day and follow Him. Therefore, here, there is the reality of Jesus Forsaken. By living Jesus Forsaken you become wise with his Wisdom.

Then it says that by following Jesus Forsaken, by living with him, you have the Holy Spirit with his gifts.

Then, living like this, living God's will, living love, we have Jesus in our midst and he is Wisdom and

he enlightens our hearts and tells us how to live.

In a couple of lines – I've spoken a lot, but the article is very short – in two lines there is the summary of all the spirituality and it says that the spirituality leads to Wisdom. Wisdom is the fruit of the spirituality. The spirituality leads you to savour God, to live in God. This is why I like this article.

I have a bit of a provocative question: is there not a risk that the rule could replace the Gospel?

Padre Fabio Ciardi

Because I personally like to have direct contact with the book. I read the book and then, afterwards I go and read the introduction, when I have already entered into the essence of the book. So, a rule is an introduction to the Gospel. Therefore, I like first of all to read the Gospel and then I read the introduction, the rule.

If you buy a book and stop at the introduction, you have lost 100% of the book. Therefore, a rule is precisely an explanation of the Gospel, an introduction into the Gospel. The rule accompanies you so that you can enter into the reality of the Gospel; therefore, it's absurd to give so much value to the rule and then forget what the rule is for.

In history perhaps there has been this danger at times. In the early to mid 20th century, a famous book came out called "The Cult of the Rule". Already these words, "the cult of the rule", are like saying "the cult of the introduction" ...

However, I think the opposite is true today.

After the Council there was a great deal of work to renew the rules, the statutes. A lot of time was spent: commissions, studies... and then in the end, after all this work, the rule is ready and is put in the drawer. This is an enormous risk. It doesn't seem to me that today there is an overvaluation of the rule, rather, there is a neglect of the rule.

We, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in 2026, will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the pontifical approval of our rule and we have already begun to give our attention to the rule, to take it in hand, to re-read it, to comment on it among ourselves, to talk to each other what it is telling us. Therefore, I think it's important to take up the rule again.

I think that for the different founders, the rule has always been important. Would you like to tell us a little more specifically what the rule meant to the different founders?

Padre Fabio Ciardi

Monasticism was born without a rule. Ideally, we usually say that monasticism was born with Saint Anthony of the desert. Since he was alone, he had no rule, or rather, he had the Gospel as the only rule. And Saint Athanasius, who wrote Saint Anthony's biography, says that Anthony's heart was a library and in this library were all the books of the Holy Scriptures and there was not a word of the Gospel that fell to the ground, because he gathered them all and lived them all; therefore, his rule was the Gospel.

After him, after his death, groups of monks were born and then Athanasius, the great bishop from where monasticism began – Egypt – wrote a rule for the monks. What is this rule? It's a biography. It's an account of Anthony's story. Athanasius understood that the rule is about how one lives the Gospel. Concretely, how one lives the Gospel. So, to all the monks of his big diocese, which was the whole of Egypt, he said, "How do you live the Gospel?" "I will tell you, I'll tell you Anthony's story." By telling Anthony's story he was recounting how one enters the Gospel.

Therefore, you see that the rule is always seen as an introduction to the Gospel. And when Pachomius arrived, that's when the monastic communities were really born. If we read the rule that he wrote, at last a rule was really written, we remain a little disappointed because they are very

practical norms: how to be together, how to eat, where to go, what to do, what not to do... There is nothing spiritual. And if we were to ask Pachomius, “How is it that you wrote a rule for your monks that is so down-to-earth without anything spiritual?” He would look at us shocked and say, “What do you mean? The rule is the Gospel. I didn’t write a rule, the rule is the Gospel. I say a few small practical norms for staying together.”

Then, as the centuries passed, the rules developed more and more. And this introduction to the Gospel becomes more and more complete, always more beautiful, always deeper. Just think of Saint Francis. He also did not want to write the rule, but then when he wrote it, before he died, he said in his will, “Do not change the rule on me! because this is truly my experience. Therefore, follow it and don’t say, ‘but I think in this way, I think in that way.’ Live it, as it is written.”

Therefore they, all of the saints, are convinced that theirs is truly an introduction to the Gospel.

For Chiara Lubich, who always told us that she only leaves us the Gospel, what is the point of the statutes then?

Padre Fabio Ciardi

That’s real genius. It’s brilliant because you see that Chiara goes back to the ancient tradition that I have just mentioned. That is, for Chiara the Word of Life is fundamental, it’s central; the Ideal began when, in the air-raid shelters, they opened the Gospel together and read it.

Some words of the Gospel emerged when Saint Francis opened the Gospel, “Go forth two by two, without taking anything with you.” He said, “I want this. This is my Gospel, I want to live this, this is how I want to live.”

So when Chiara opened the Gospel and read Jesus’ Testament, mutual love, unity, the presence of Jesus in the midst of those who live mutual love, she said, “I want this, this is our life.” Therefore, it’s truly brilliant to refer to the Gospel: it’s real genius, but it’s not at all original.

This idea – “I leave you only the Gospel” – was said by all the founders. Chiara is part of a Church tradition, and in this she is by no means new.

The first great rule, the rule of Basil, which still governs all eastern monasticism, he never called it a rule. That is, what we call “the rule” today, Basil’s great rule, he never called it a rule and if he knew that today we call it a rule, he would turn in his grave. Because he had in his hand what he considered his rule: “the *moralia*”. A text that he always had in his hands.

When I started studying these things, I went to the library to find this book that he always had in his hands. And I was greatly disappointed. Ignorant as I am, then more than now, I was greatly disappointed because I saw that this great book, which he always spoke about, his great book, his great rule, was simply a transcription of 1,500 verses of the New Testament.

So I said, “But I can do this too, but what kind of book is this?” Then I understood the greatness of Basil. That he had the New Testament as his rule. And what we call a rule are the answers he gave to his friends, to his brothers and sisters. When they were together they would ask him, “Father? Could you explain to us how to live the first commandment ‘love God...’” And he would explain it and they would take notes.

“Father, could you explain to us how to live...” And this became the rule.

You see, the rule, once more, is the explanation he gave of the Gospel. But he did not leave this rule. He left his 1,500 verses of the New Testament. This applies to everyone a little bit.

Just think of the great rule that guides the whole of the West, the rule of Saint Benedict, do you know how it ends?

This great rule ends by saying, “This is a rule for beginners, for those who do not yet know how to take the first steps, but for those who are going ahead in life, for those who really want to reach perfection, please, go to the New Testament.” Therefore, Saint Benedict leaves his rule for beginners,

to begin with the first steps, but then in order to run you need the New Testament. Therefore, Chiara is brilliant in saying this, but fortunately it's not original, because it continues a wonderful tradition that accompanies the whole Church.

is there one article in the Statutes that you have particularly at heart?

Adriana Cosseddu

I can say that there is an extraordinary beauty in each article, so choosing is never easy. However, article 2 of the Statutes struck me deeply and I would like to read it together, because there we find the explanation, the heart of this double name, Focolare Movement – Work of Mary. This is what it says: “The Focolare Movement which bears the name Work of Mary because of its characteristic spirituality, modelled upon Mary, gives Christ spiritually to the world in the diversity of its composition, its worldwide spreading, its relationship with Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities, with people of various religious faiths and with persons with no particular religious affiliation, and for the fact that its President is a lay woman. These all demonstrate its special bond with Mary Most Holy, the mother of Christ and of every person. It wishes to be, as much as possible, a presence of Mary on earth, almost a continuation of her.”

I think that this is the very heart of this definition and Chiara had written in her Diary: “In 1949 I saw that God’s plan for us was to be “a little Mary”, the same as his mother in everything. Later I understood that Jesus wanted us to relive her on earth This in unity with the others and then individually too.”

Here we go back to our giving Christ spiritually to the world. But how? To embrace all of humanity; like Mary, who is mother of all and of each one. It’s a new way of looking at Mary. She is the one who opens our hearts to the dimension of universal fraternity. But her love is for everyone, her love is for each person. So, I imagine her being so thoughtful for each one of us, in a closeness that thinks of all our needs, of our necessities, strong in those promises that she herself sings in the Magnificat and entrusts us with the possibility to bring about the social revolution. So, if I had to summarise this article I’d say: Mary teaches us what love is.

Adriana, so much for one article, but if we wished to summarise the whole message of the Statutes into a few words, it’s not easy, but what would you say?

Adriana Cosseddu

I’d say that to appreciate something or someone it is first necessary to get to know them, so I think I could say that it’s also important to discover the most hidden root in the Statutes, the root that holds the variety of the Movement in unity. Therefore, to do this I’d like to use an image which is that of the tree, to which Chiara already compared the Movement in 1949. She saw it like this: think of the structure of the tree, there is a root that lives hidden, but it gives rise to the trunk which becomes the supporting structure. Then the branches grow out from the trunk, they are all different, diversified from each other. And this is precisely the variety of the Movement, which is then expressed in the branches, in the movements. Then there are the flowers which continuously blossom, which explain the continuous newness and that I like to think of as the beauty of our outer appearance. Then there is the sap that flows, that nourishes, that fortifies. What can this sap be? Life. Life that is based on mutual love, what Chiara already explains in the Premise to the Statutes. This struck me because this being mutual love on that first page, which is the beginning, reminds me of those words Chiara always repeated, “life precedes law”. So, what do the Statutes hand on to us today? I’d say life.

In this regard, another comparison comes to mind, which is that of the Constitutions that are the foundation of the life of many different countries. What do the Constitutions contain? They have general principles, rights, the duties of citizens. Then they explain what kind of government the country has, what is also its organization, the structure of its territories. This can be true for us too, through the Statutes. We too are a people, a somewhat original one because a people born of the Gospel and not defined by borders, because this people lives as far as the ends of the earth in the variety of peoples and of nations.

Its freedom is ensured by listening to “that voice”: it’s the voice of a Father who is Love and who loves all his children without preferences. The equality is maintained in the immense value of each one, seen as another Jesus, Jesus for one another, without differences. So, like every statute, even the Statutes of the Work of Mary tell us what we should be and they outline, what I like to think, but also Chiara called it like this, our identity card. The identity card introduces us, it contains all our essential features, in a brief, concise way. So, what is the content of the Statutes as our identity card? They have all those characteristics we have mentioned, but they add something else. It’s a mystical dimension: it’s a very original norm that Chiara gives us and it is the presence of Jesus, Jesus among us. The points of the spirituality reach their climax in Him, He is the one who guides the Work of Mary. So, I like to recall some of Chiara’s expressions which really help us to understand the truest, deepest meaning, I’d also say the beauty [that is there], beyond the juridical meaning. For Chiara they expressed the rule of rules, the norm of norms, and where is it treasured? In Jesus in the midst. Therefore, it’s not a juridical form, but it is life. For Chiara it expressed only the will of God, written in a rule and she added, “The rule that a founder, as an instrument in the hands of an artist, sets out in its essential lines, has to and wants to do so, with the strength with which a mother says, ‘this is my child.’”

To get to know these Statutes a bit more, could you explain to us how they are structured?

Adriana Cosseddu

So, here we are asked to leaf through the Statutes. It immediately strikes us that it is precisely in the Premise that we already find the main points, which are enclosed there. Perhaps we can mention some, so that we can make them even more our own. First of all, mutual and constant love. The presence of Jesus among all, therefore, to the ends of the earth, at all latitudes; it’s a love that doesn’t measure and has within it a secret which is Jesus Forsaken. Then there are the aspects which are the colours of our life. Here it’s really beautiful, because it came to me spontaneously to go and reread them a little to see and understand how to live. I rediscovered that the colours are nothing other than the words of the Gospel, words to live by. But they are not only in what we might call the more spiritual dimension, but also in their capacity to generate a new culture. Let’s think of the colour red, the communion of goods: when put into practice, Chiara says, it generates and brings about the culture of giving. Therefore, our living generates culture, it becomes culture. And then again looking through the Statutes we find the nature, the goal, which is the general goal, therefore perfection in love, but also the specific goal, which is unity. The unity which, in article 8, can be seen as the gift that Jesus asks of the Father. Therefore, it’s not something we just do automatically in our life, it’s a gift that God gives us, but it’s up to us to create the conditions. But then the reality of the Statutes continues through that part that concerns the structure, that regards the composition [of the movement]. Here it is beautiful because there is all the variety that exists in the Work of Mary.

Then the fourth part which is the government, then the life of the zones. Then there is another part – from part six onwards – which in some way is as if it explains in its variety what in the first parts is the unity of the Movement. This Work of Mary which is one opens up and there we find the movements, we find the branches, then we find the relationships with those of the various Churches,

of other ecclesial communities who are a living part, who live in communion with us in the Movement. Then there are also the people of other religions, people of non-religious affiliations. Then we reach the page that regards the relationships with the (Catholic) Church. Because the Movement was approved in the Church and must respond to the Church.

So what do these Statutes tell us? Everything speaks of the personal and communitarian dimension of our life. We find the dialogues – we know – the 5 wide-ranging dialogues, the interweaving of relationships, as I was saying. Here there is also a variety of expression, because we go from communion to universal fraternity, to unity.

Recently, I have found in the experience we are living together in the commission, which is studying the revision of the Statutes, the possibility of rediscovering the beauty of the Statutes themselves. Above all, it was in rereading them together, rereading them together with the other members of the commission. There it was as if God himself was explaining something to me. On the one hand, the golden thread that links all these norms to one another. Usually, I would dwell on one norm or another; for the fifth dialogue: let's go and see what it is like; for the Abba School: let's go and see what Chiara says... But not here. Here it's like a journey, step by step, where this golden thread connects all the parts of the Statutes. But not only that. It's as if a light is switched on beneath each word and you feel that it is full of a specific meaning. And that meaning there explains the meaning of another word from another part of the Statutes. So, it's as if a mosaic is being put together.