movimento dei
focolari

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

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Lesson 3B
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The Statutes: inheritance and prophecy

It was in 2007 when important changes to the Statutes were approved. Chiara had personally worked on them back in 2003. The most recent foundations in the Work of Mary were included: Sophia University, the inundations, some changes in the General Government too...
However, I would like to begin this moment together with a little sharing: by chance, I recently heard on the radio, while driving, the words of a priest who said something like this: *Jesus doesn't make us special people, but he makes our way of being in the world something special*.
I was struck by this, and I thought: perhaps, in some way, we could say the same for the Statutes that Chiara left us; they do not make us special as members of the Movement, but they make our way of inhabiting the world special.
Let us try to get to know the Statutes together, at least a little bit, as if we were walking along a path guided by a compass that directs us: the compass offers us four directions, indicated by the cardinal points, that guide us in the direction to take.
For us, they become keywords that we could define as follows:

1. legacy
2. identity
3. relevance today
4. prophecy

1. The first: legacy

We all know that a legacy represents what a person leaves behind: usually his or her possessions, but also a patrimony of ideas, values, or simply his or her example of life: this is the case for saints and founders, but we also experience it with key figures such as Gandhi...
When a mother leaves her children, what does she have at heart? First of all, that her children live as one! We all remember Chiara's words: "be a family"! But we also know that there is a *place* where Chiara explains to us how to do this: it is the Premise to the Statutes of the Work of Mary, a page born from life, for life. Chiara placed her signature there and this precedes every other norm!
The Premise begins with "mutual and constant love, which … brings the presence of Jesus among all"; therefore, not only among some, but at every latitude, to the ends of the earth.
In this way, the Statutes become a "compass" and preserve, norm after norm, what Chiara

repeatedly called her legacy: Jesus in the midst. This is what she said about Him:
"If there was a charism that God put in here, it was 'two or more united in my name', meaning, the idea of Jesus in the midst, which is an idea of Jesus ... taken from the Gospel, ... his presence." (1 June 1969)

However, there were other occasions when Chiara expressed herself in other words: "Leave to those who follow you only the Gospel". Perhaps the juridical structure of the Statutes reduced the evangelical strength of the charism?
Let us return to the words with which Chiara responded to the question on the importance of juridical things: she explained, "for me, the juridical is nothing more than the chalice into which I have poured the whole Ideal ..., all the Ideal that God has given me over the years." So, if the small history of the Movement, the initial spark, will remain for us "an extremely precious key to unlock the Gospel" (Chiara, 8th of December 1972), the Movement itself, which followed, and which finds its seal in the norms of the Statutes, is called to be like *another Mary: "all Gospel, nothing but the Gospel, and because it is the Gospel, it will not die"*. And we fully rediscover this today in Article 7 of the Statutes.
Let us then open the little booklet of the Statutes and read it, in Part 1, Chapter III; it concerns the Spirit of the Work of Mary. This is preceded by Article 5: the *general goal: love*. How can this be achieved?
Chiara gave a beautiful explanation of this in her Diary in 1967: "…perfect in love, ... towards everyone, means seeing the beauty in everything and in all the vocations of the Movement and of the Church, gathering the positive from all peoples, contributing with this decisive attitude to universal fraternity and peace."

A goal to be achieved according to the Gospel-based spirituality.
And the "points of the spirituality", which follow in Article 8, are studded with words from the Gospel. We do not have the time to read them here. As an example, I will only quote point 3 of Article 8 on the "Will of God", which coincides with our commitment "to live the Gospel, being nourished daily with the Word of God so as to acquire his way of thinking, of willing, of loving". Are these not the words that we read in *Paradise '49*, in those "Previous understandings" that through the intensity of the life of the Word prepared them for the mystical experience that followed?
The conclusion to *Part 1* of the Statutes is Jesus Forsaken. This ensures that the Ideal does not enclose us in an introspective dimension but rather opens our *communitarian spirituality* to a universal dimension in order to embrace in humanity the "all" for whom Jesus gave his life.
This first part of the Statutes contains the indispensable "essential core", the *charismatic identity* of the Work of Mary, approved in the broadest form permitted by the Code of Canon Law: "*a private, universal association of the faithful, of pontifical right*." Within it: the Nature, with the *essential, constitutive elements*; the Goal, which encompasses the *essence of the charism*; the Spirit, that safeguards the *charismatic physiognomy*.

2. Now we come to the second word: "incarnated" identity

Let's go back to the 7th of December 1986, when Chiara, speaking to the women focolarine, explained that the Statutes "are the most important work that a founder has to leave to the others .... The Statutes are extremely important because they contain all the life of a work of God ... they contain the structure of the Work of Mary, how it is governed and guided, everything!"

So much so that (besides the presence of Jesus in the midst) Chiara said, *the second thing that will*

save the Work of Mary will be the Statutes.
So in our *compass*, we can find the characteristics of the identity of the Work of Mary in *Part Two* of the Statutes, which is dedicated to its "Structure and composition" in the variety of vocations, branches and wide-ranging Movements, all belonging to the Work of Mary with "different rights and responsibilities" (as shown in Article 13).
In fact, in the universal openness, Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, people of other religions and of other convictions are also part of the Movement (we can already read this in Article 1). We consider these people within the common horizon of the unity of the human family while respecting their differences (as indicated in Article 6).
When, after the approval of the first Statutes of the "Movement as One" in 1990, Chiara presented them at the retreat of the General Assembly, she explained: "The Statutes are to the Work of Mary what the design of an architect is to a house, but with one difference. Whereas an architect must first make the design and then the house, in this case, the house comes first, that is, the Work of God comes first and then this Work expresses the Statutes, that is, its idea. It's a little like the Father who expresses the Word, the idea of Himself." She continued saying, "here, we are not dealing with Statutes written about things of the world. It's something completely different," they speak of a Work of God, born in the bosom of the Trinity.
In the Catholic Church's recognition of the charism "its whole organization is also an *expression of the charism*".
And here I would like to go back to the root, to share something that struck me deeply, namely, Chiara's words about Foco, always considered, together with Fr Foresi, a co-founder of the Work of Mary. Chiara said:

"The encounter with Giordani brought about a new composition of the Movement. I am deeply moved every time I open the Statutes of our Movement, which have been approved by the Church for the centuries to come. There, I find some realities that would never have appeared if Foco had not existed." Because he, as a father, politician, and writer, carried within himself an openness to human situations, so much so that for Chiara he always represented humanity, and with it the "whole Movement".
And Foco, almost as Chiara's echo, wrote in a letter dated the 24th of September 1964: "We, the married laity, bring those treasures to environments where usually neither priests nor nuns reach .... There is a great commitment, with a visionary, revolutionary audacity. If it succeeds, it will give the Church the decisive strength to establish dialogue with the world."

So, if with Fr Foresi the incarnation of the Work of Mary took place, and with it also its government - at the Centre and in the zones - (to which *Parts Four and Five* of the Statutes are dedicated), with Foco the doors were opened wide to humanity.
So, we ask ourselves: in this diverse reality of young people, consecrated persons, families, children, entrepreneurs and religious, does looking in depth at the identity as a Movement make it perhaps self-referential?
If we take up the words of Pope Francis who invited the bishops in America to "not lower our gaze, concerned only with our concerns, but raise it constantly toward the horizons which God opens before us", we also recognise ourselves in the horizon that the Statutes already give us as written in Article 3: to point our gaze to "May they all be one" and turn ourselves to the "renewal of individuals, the Church and society".

3. And here the third word: relevance today or perhaps even actualization

Today, the many conflicts, the multiple polarisations, the inability to listen and dialogue as alternative 'weapons' to deal with the innumerable conflicts seem to be driving away all horizons of encounter, in the impossibility of influencing the powerful and opposing violence. But love also is alive in the silence of Mary, who changed the course of history with her yes. It is a Gospel-based love that reaches the concrete aspects of the life of the Movement and of individuals, to the point of giving rise to "specific works and activities" as Article 23 states at the beginning of *Part Three* of the Statutes.
For Chiara, the different aspects, born of the Holy Spirit, reflect, precisely by virtue of their origin, the dynamic of "death and resurrection": "death of what? Of that aspect of life as it was understood before." This is Chiara's explanation.
So, the red, which is the first of the aspects of love that becomes life, brought about the death of "the old way of conceiving the economy" - which today has led to many people becoming poor and a few becoming rich – so as to give life to the new way , based on God's Providence and the communion of goods, without forgetting about work, which is constitutive of human dignity. We can simply read articles 24 to 27.
And the orange has its innovation in the spreading of the Ideal to the point of giving life in the most diverse areas to "the local action cells", which, through unity in Christ, can give "new strength to people" so that they can, in their turn, help others, as is stated in Article 38. Today, we could also think of them as "cells of peace", animated by love to oppose grudges and heal wounds, in schools, offices, homes...
And the yellow, what is new in thinking of prayer? Not formulas to be recited on certain occasions, but rather to pray "always", to mirror Jesus' words on the need to pray always, but in the typical way that for us "is love of neighbour", as is stated in Article 47, to the point of losing everything: even God for God in our neighbour, and to find union with God through our neighbour.
And the green? At the heart there is Jesus in the midst, in Him there is "spiritual health"; but it is an aspect that decisively changes our outlook on health and illness as well: "if the grain of wheat does not die ...".
And, *going against the current* of the culture that today favours euthanasia, looking at the sick as "living hosts", as is written in Article 57. A new way of looking that even extends to care for Creation, which is to be preserved through our commitment to ecology, because everything is received as a gift, and every life asks for love.
Then the blue, portraying the beauty of God Love and to be seen as his worthy children... as we can read in Article 60.
And we could go on... but we could simply draw out from the Statutes that golden thread that in the "white light" composes and distinguishes the many colours: it is the Gospel, which, with its Words permeates the norms on the aspects of our life and we can find many of them from Articles 24 to 72.
So the Statutes become a mirror of this, and not to look at ourselves in an almost self-congratulatory way, but to adapt ourselves today too to a lifestyle born of the Gospel: wearing the right clothes, according to the moment and to our personality, ready to adapt and renew them in order to live everyday life alongside every person and "sharing in God's designs for humanity, colouring the crowd with patterns of light", while sharing "with our neighbour the shame, the hunger, the sufferings and the brief joys".
This is what Jesus did and he did not avoid the events of his time, indeed he was their protagonist.

4. Here we are at the fourth word: prophecy

Today let us go back for a moment to a question addressed to Chiara: "Can you tell us what the Statutes are for you?" "They are the most precious thing in the Movement!"; and in that circumstance Chiara continued: "there, there was the grace of prophecy, the gift of prophecy; we could already see the future back then, when things were not there." And it would be what Chiara would hand over to the Gen when she met them in 2001: what is described in the Statute is the "identity card" of the Movement (like a *son or daughter* who has those eyes, that hair) and Chiara entrusts the Gen with two things: "faithfulness to the founder or foundress, and Jesus in the midst"; - and she concludes, "he will enlighten you".
Where to? The goal, which "among Christians is unity, but among all is universal fraternity".
An unlimited goal, in view of which Chiara, speaking in 2001 to the Communities of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, recommended *reaching out* with the *dialogues, the inundations* and concrete actions of the Ideal. Therefore, in the Movement: "maintain, develop and deepen", in the certainty that the house built on the rock will not collapse, "and for us," she said, "the rock is unity".
In this time of conflict, hatred and violence, the commitment in the Movement is decidedly going against the current: to *implement and strive* "to live as perfectly as possible Jesus' new commandment: 'This is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you. No one has a greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends'", as written in article 8, point 5.

It is the way to unity, which becomes dialogue, to bring what is lacking into the Church and the world.
Unity also opens up new horizons in today's Church, in its synodal journey, to bring the gift of our experience and to generate, if we can use this expression a "Marian" Church, where, like Mary who is fully "lay", we can generate Jesus for the world, according to Article 2.
And if the world is a book to be read, history is a book to be written.
As we conclude, looking together at humanity and the Church, let us try to go over Article 6 of the Statutes, on the specific goal and looking to the future for the many ways to achieve it.
It was just at Christmas that Pope Francis invited us, in the turmoil of our time, to seek and live love in the "wonderful gift" of mutual love that opens the door to fraternity. And isn't this our characteristic?
In her 1997 address to the United Nations, Chiara said that in the face of wars and the many justifications that will always be found to generate them, there is a need for "a supplement", rooted in the "value of love", since - and I quote – "the future of the world, … its capacity to progress, to find solutions to its conflicts and crises, depends solely on the awareness of individuals and the commitment of people."
After all, we can read in the Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO, which came into force in 1946: "That since wars begin in the minds of human beings, it is in the minds of humans that the defences of peace must be constructed."
It is life today that is always renewed, because of its capacity to generate instead of clashing, and because of the strength of paths of reconciliation, not only good practices, but a culture of encounter.
Therefore, in relationships, where respect for the other knows how to become listening and dialogue, ways are opened up to build a "culture of peace", cement for the unity of peoples, and here it is wonderful to read *Part Nine* of the Statutes.
And "respect" is the word chosen for this year 2025, by the Treccani Encyclopaedia in Italy.

It is beautiful to hear again what Pope Francis is indicating to the whole Church today, precisely to

make ecumenism visible and fruitful, with words that almost echo the life of communion in the Movement, to which Part *Seven* of the Statutes is dedicated. The Pope encourages to:
walk together, pray together. The scandal must be overcome by doing things together with gestures of unity and fraternity. Ecumenical dialogue is not a dispute, it is 'an exchange of gifts' and we Christians can proclaim the power of the Gospel to all, because what unites us is much greater than what divides us. Unity will not come as a miracle at the end, it comes along the way, the Holy Spirit does it on the way, walking together is already making unity.
Or, let us think of how many things have been generated by the charism, and that today are also realities of the Church: the same relationship and dialogue with other religions, of which it was recently said in the Church: it is "a revolutionary path" can be found in *Part Eight* of the Statutes.
But a final word could be the one launched at the Youth Meeting (TED) in Vancouver in 2017, "The future you"; as Pope Francis said:
"The future of humankind isn't exclusively in the hands of politicians, of great leaders, of big companies. … the future is, most of all, in the hands of those people who recognize the other as a "you" and themselves as part of an "us."
A single individual is enough for hope to exist. And that individual can be you. And then there will be another "you," and yet another "you," and it turns into an "us." And so, does hope begin when we have an "us?" No. Hope began with one "you." When there is an "us," there a revolution begins."
It will be Jesus, present on our journey through the world, who will accomplish it, and with it, the vocation of the Movement, explained in the *Fable that blossomed along "Foco" lane*: "to make the earth a firmament".