
IN DIALOGUE

GOING IN DEPTH UPM 2025

LESSON 3 *by Renata Simon and Francisco Canzani*



Welcome back and thank you for the various comments you have shared with us. As you will have seen, in order to make the texts and sections more accessible, we have included a direct link to the individual texts on the homepage of the UPM website.

The answers to the questions received after the third lesson are interesting and varied, so we will give space to them here.

CHIARA AND THE LONG WAIT

Are there letters or documents in the Centre's archives that illustrate how Chiara experienced the long wait for the approval of the Statutes?

Yes, there are, and they will be accessible eventually; first there is a demanding and lengthy job of cataloguing to be done, and the time frame set down by the rules governing archives must be respected. Regarding your specific question, i.e. how Chiara experienced the "long wait for the approval of the Statutes", I feel it is important to point out that many documents and letters have already been published, and they also present the historical context in which they were written. To give some examples, which are by no means exhaustive, I would mention the following, although I am aware that these books and materials are only available in Italian. I am really sorry! I don't think we will find a solution in the short term but, in the future, with everyone's cooperation, we hope to be able to make these texts accessible in other languages.

C. Lubich, *Lettere 1939-1960*, (Opere di Chiara Lubich 4/1) [Letters 1939-1960 (The Works of Chiara Lubich 4/1)], edited by Florence Gillet, Città Nuova - Centro Chiara Lubich, Rome 2022;

M. C. Atzori, "La luce va data". *Meditazioni di Chiara Lubich: prima edizione critica*, (Studi e Documenti 4), ["The light should be given" Meditations by Chiara Lubich: first critical edition (Studies and Documents 4)], Città Nuova - Centro Chiara Lubich, Rome 2021;

L. Abignente, "Qui c'è il dito di Dio". *Carlo de Ferrari e Chiara Lubich: il discernimento di un carisma*, (Studi e Documenti 2), ["This is the hand of God." Carlo de Ferrari and Chiara Lubich: the discernment of a charism (Studies and Documents 2)], Città Nuova - Centro Chiara Lubich, Rome 2017.

Lucia Abignente

POPE PAUL VI

Lucia, you briefly mentioned Pope Paul VI, referring to the important role he played in this journey. I would like to know more about it, or where I can find this material.

The care and wisdom with which Pope Paul VI followed the Focolare Movement (Work of Mary) were fundamental in the search for an institutional form that would respect the physiognomy of this new ecclesial reality, which he understood as a "Work of God". In the early 1950s, when he was still Substitute of the Secretariat of State, Montini had had contacts with Chiara Lubich and with some of the first focolarine, in particular Giulia (Eli) Folonari. It was he who gave that wise and 'paternal' assurance, which Chiara fully accepted and shared with the focolarini as a precious light: the Holy Office is "a guarantee and protection. ... it is Church, the Mother Church". From the time that Montini became Archbishop of Milan, in November 1954, contacts were less frequent, but they were never interrupted. In November 1960, during the Plenary Assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference (which I mentioned in the lesson), Montini's diplomatic experience had a decisive impact in preventing the dissolution of the Movement. For an in-depth study of his role in the journey to full approval of the Focolare Movement, I recommend first of all a book that is the fruit of two study days (November 2014) jointly organised by the Paul VI Institute and the Chiara Lubich Centre: Paolo VI e Chiara Lubich. La profezia di una Chiesa che si fa dialogo, [Pope Paul VI and Chiara Lubich. The prophecy of a Church that becomes dialogue], Edizioni Studium, Brescia 2015. It contains studies that are also based on unpublished documents. Important elements of the relationship the Pontiff had with the Movement are also in the book Paolo VI e il Movimento dei Focolari [Pope Paul VI and the Focolare Movement], Città Nuova, Rome 1978 – where his words of greeting, exhortations and teachings are collected – and the numerous references in Chiara's diaries, in C. Lubich, Diario 1964-1980, (Opere di Chiara Lubich 3/1), [Diary 1964-29-80, (The Works of Chiara Lubich 3/1)], edited by Fabio Ciardi, Città Nuova – Centro Chiara Lubich, Rome 2023.

Lucia Abignente

THE STATUTES AND THE EXPERIENCE OF 1949

Did the experience of 1949 influence the drafting of the first Statutes and the current General Statutes?

This question would require a lengthy answer. I will limit myself to a brief outline. The experience of 1949 certainly influenced the drafting of different kinds of statutes submitted to the Church. For chronological reasons, it could not have influenced the first, brief statute approved by the archbishop of Trent in 1947 and confirmed in 1948. Furthermore, it seems to me that we can only speak of a partial influence at the moments when, in the drafting of the rules or statutes, the visitators appointed by the Church had an important role.

As it has happened in the life of several founders, who had important experiences of illumination that gradually took shape in a new ecclesial reality brought to life by a charism given by God, so it also happened for Chiara. The experience of 1949 was never erased from her soul. This can be seen in her later writings that are influenced by that experience, and it can also be seen in those versions of the statutes that bear her 'stamp' or signature. I would give just one example, from the Appunti di Regola (Notes to the Rule) of 1958 where for the first time the title Opera di Maria (Work of Mary) is used, which is "instinctively named after Her (Mary)". That word "instinctively" does not lead us to think of an improvised or random choice. It bears a strong continuity with an experience lived by Chiara in 1949 when, contemplating the beauty of Mary, the woman of love, and yet seemingly alone, Chiara had asked her to "make a family of children similar to her". And this continuity can also be seen today, in the General Statutes. It is enough to quote what is stated in Article 2:

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 relationships 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.[1]

[1] Provisional translation New City Press 2008

Therefore, you can understand Chiara's significant affirmations about the relationship between the Work of Mary as it emerged, also in its structure, and the experience of "Paradise 1949". Among these affirmations, in addition to the one mentioned during the lesson (that while the Movement as a spiritual current was born in '43, the Work of Mary was born in '49), we can also recall another, an even more explicit one. In a text prepared in 2004 for the second generation of the Movement, to whom she had begun to transmit the contents of that experience of illumination, Chiara said this: "It is becoming clearer and clearer to me ...: I certainly saw Paradise, a Paradise that the Holy Spirit wanted to show me, but I also saw the Work of Mary."

Lucia Abignente

DO NOT TOUCH THE BABY

Since changes to the Statutes are expected at the General Assembly, I would like to know which parts can be modified, bearing in mind that Chiara told us: 'Do not touch the baby'.

It's not easy to answer, because in the General Statutes the charism, which gave rise to the Work of Mary, is intertwined with the juridical aspect, not only because it must be expressed through norms, but also because existing juridical instruments must be used. So, for example, the General Assembly - which elects the President, the Co-President and the Councillors who make up the Centre of the Work of Mary - is a governing body taken from the tradition of the Church. When, on the other hand, the Statutes explain, for example, the practical aspects of life through 'colours', as ways in which love, true Christian agape, is expressed, this is proper to the charism.

So, which parts of the Statutes can be changed? Something has already been said about this when responding to other questions. We can also look at the fact that Chiara herself updated the General Statutes in 2007 (the first ones approved in 1990): she did so regarding the life of the dialogues, our "pathways" towards humanity; the "inundations" had developed, and together with them the dialogue "with modern day culture and its human realities" [art. 6 e)]. These were introduced into the Statutes. Or, again in the Statutes approved in 2007, think of the references introduced into the text of Article 1 about Christians of various Churches and Ecclesial Communities, even though - already with the changes to the Statutes in 1994 - they were included in the life of the Movement (Article 15) as "aggregates" and no longer only as "collaborators" (as in the Statutes of 1990).

Of course, back then the Work of Mary was still in foundation and Chiara intervened as its founder. Today we know that we cannot add or take away anything from that 'baby', which is now complete, but rather make it grow and develop. Therefore, as we look towards the General Assembly of 2026, every proposal to make changes will always have to be studied and deepened, so as to verify whether or not it affects the basic nature of the charism, destined to remain as such for the centuries. On the other hand, if a word needs to be updated, it can be done, like those updates that become necessary in the light of the Church's journey, or those that the Church itself requires.

Adriana Cosseddu

A FABLE

*I was curious to note that in your conclusion you mentioned a fable.
I am not familiar with this fable and would like to understand in
what sense it can enlighten us about the vocation of our Movement?*

The full title is: Favola fiorita lungo il sentiero “Foco”. (“Fable that blossomed along ‘Foco’ lane”). It was a text written by Chiara Lubich probably in 1950. It is in the form of a fable which recounts and brings to mind, with the liveliness of riddles and the colourful beauty of images, that divine event that was for her and her first companions the origin of the gift later recognised by the Church as the charism of unity.

Perhaps what is most striking is the fact that, as the Movement developed, Chiara repeated that 'story', giving it a broader interpretation. So, in 2004, she drew on that text to explain to the Gen how the Work of Mary was born and how it came to be, so much so that she observed: 'it is a true fable, it represents the Work of Mary with its various vocations and incarnations that would gradually blossom from the charism'.

The fable can be read in C. Lubich, *Favola fiorita lungo il sentiero "Foco"* [*Fable that blossomed along “Foco” lane*], in "Nuova Umanità" 218 (2015/2).

Adriana Cosseddu

THE STATUTES AND SYNODALITY

You used four key words to tell us about the Statutes. Even if this word is not used in the General Statutes, what aspect of the Statutes refers to synodality?

Regarding the synodal process, Margaret Karram spoke of a walking together, for an "outgoing Church, which is by its very nature open to dialogue" to the point of embracing the whole of humanity. Piero Coda, a theologian, highlighted participation as a key word. There are three verbs that especially indicate the special nature of this common journey in the Church: meet, listen, discern.

Other expressions that characterise the synodal process are: listening and feeling you have been listened to, which also means welcoming, living relationships of reciprocity in evangelical love, sharing; it also means intergenerational dialogue, the encounter between different cultures, but also the world of the family, the themes of justice, politics, economics, peace... A journey that encourages Christian communities to share fraternity with men and women of other religions, convictions and cultures. Here, we can find the specific aims of the Work of Mary.

If we then try to examine our spirituality, rooted in the Gospel, it is a spirituality that has its 'premise' in mutual love, from which we allow ourselves to be guided in our actions to the point of contributing in unity to universal fraternity. Our style is a life of fraternal communion also with Christians of various Churches and Ecclesial Communities, an open dialogue in sharing with people of other religions or convictions, in a journey towards "may they all be one". Is this not the journey with Jesus among us in the Work of Mary? And does not listening in the Spirit (as Piero Coda says) mean listening to Jesus in the midst, a presence that is deeply rooted in the word synodality?

Adriana Cosseddu

THE STATUTES AND CANON LAW

Could you explain more what links exist between the General Statutes and Canon Law, which is cited in the Statutes? Does one have to know Canon Law to understand the Statutes?

We should keep in mind that the Focolare Movement was born within the Catholic Church and approved as a Catholic Movement. This explains the reference to Canon Law in the General Statutes.

Originally, when the Ideal was born, the Code of Canon Law in use was that of 1917, which had a lot of emphasis on the hierarchy. Today, the current Code is that of 1983, because a revision was necessary after the Second Vatican Council. We can see in it the openness to interreligious dialogue or even the figure of the lay person and the right to form associations. The Work of Mary itself found its place by being recognised as a 'private, universal association of pontifical right' and this allows it to live today as an ecclesial movement. Not only that: the Statutes contain its own internal laws, i.e. the Movement is recognised as having the ability to give itself norms, its own rules of life and governance, for who belongs to it and its journey towards "may they all be one". These are all elements that define its identity and charism, but always within the framework of the canonical order.

This means that, although the value of the Statutes lies in the charism they contain, it is also true that in order to know certain subjects in depth, even in the General Statutes (thinking of our ecumenical dialogue), it is useful to know Canon Law.

Adriana Cosseddu

FOCUS ON THE STATUTES

Once more, this month we quote some articles from the Statutes.

Art. 6 - The Work of Mary, in faithfulness to the experience of the Spirit who has guided its foundation and development, constantly seeks to fulfil the conditions asked by Jesus (Mt 18:20) so that he, himself, may bestow upon it the gift of unity according to his prayer to the Father: “May they all be one” (Jn 17:21); The Work of Mary aims then to bring this unity among all Christians, broadening its work to reach universal fraternity.

On this foundation the Work of Mary is committed:

- a)** to work for an ever-deeper unity among the faithful of the Catholic Church, as well as with ecclesial institutions associations, groups and movements born from new and old charisms within the Catholic Church, so as to increase communion among all, at every level;
- b)** to establish relationships of fraternal communion and common witness with Christians of other Churches and ecclesial communities, as a contribution toward the re-establishment of a full and visible communion.

Furthermore the Work of Mary aims:

- c)** to foster the deepest possible union in God among all believers by practising together the “Golden Rule”, through dialogue and engaging in activities that are of interest to all, and by loving, which is true Christian agape, to spread universal brotherhood. In this way, the followers of other religions will come to know the love and fullness of grace that can be found in Christ; at the same time, Christians will learn to appreciate more fully the values contained in the religion of others.
- d)** to love and to dialogue with people who believe in and practise the great human/Christian values of social justice, freedom, solidarity, peace etc., basing this on the fullest respect towards those with no particular religious affiliation; this is meant to be a contribution to the unity of the human family.
- e)** to dialogue with modern day culture and its human realities, so as to permeate them with Christian wisdom.

Adriana Cosseddu

Art. 23 – The spirit of the Work of Mary (Focolare Movement), which is love, is revealed and expressed in the manifold concrete aspects of the life of the Work of Mary and of those who take part in it. These General Statutes contain the fundamental ideas and norms concerning these concrete aspects which each one of the Work of Mary is to adopt as the basis for implementing what is provided for in the regulations of the section, branch or movement to which he or she belongs. Specific works and activities may develop from this life in accordance with these various aspects. They are to be followed by the respective councillors in the Central Governing Body of the Work of Mary entrusted with that aspect (See art. 96).[2]

[2] Provisional translation New City Press 2008