
IN DIALOGUE

GOING IN DEPTH UPM 2025

LESSON 4 / *by Renata Simon and Francisco Canzani*



Thank you for joining us on this journey in discovering the riches contained in our General Statutes. In this way we are preparing the ground for our General Assembly, which we will experience with greater awareness, in the synodal spirit that characterises the Catholic Church today and in dialogue with the various Churches and with the whole world.

For those who do not speak one of the five languages available on the website, we would like to point out that other languages are gradually being added to the 'Indy' archive platform, thanks to the work of other translators from different zones.

But let's move on to the answers to your questions, received after lesson 4.

THE GOSPEL OR THE STATUTES?

Before reading the Statutes, it would be appropriate for the young people of the Movement to read the Gospel... and the Statutes afterwards. What do you think?

After the first lessons of this cycle of the UPM the answer to this question may seem obvious: we pointed out that when asked to write a rule, the founders usually replied: “Our rule is the Gospel”. In order to be able to say this, it was certainly necessary to have first read and lived the Gospel. Even Chiara, at the beginning of the Focolare Movement, found it difficult to think of a rule given that everything that was coming to life was the fruit of reading and living the Gospel in the first community of the Movement in Trent.

A little later, she realised that the charism given to her, shed light especially on certain words of the Gospel that the Holy Spirit wanted to emphasise especially at that time in the Church and humanity (see Article 8 of the General Statutes).

If there are young or adult Christians in our Movement who have not yet read, or heard during the Sunday liturgy, at least one of the four Gospels, we strongly recommend that they do so. I remember the first time I read the entire Gospel of Mark, in several instalments. It was during my fifth-grade religion classes. I am still grateful to our parish priest for introducing us in this way to the life of Jesus, to his words, the works he did and the final revelation of his identity as man-God.

The question, however, highlights a possible deficiency in our formation. Living one word of the Gospel after another – this is the practice of the ‘Word of Life’ – is like learning the alphabet of Christian life. But if this alphabet is not then used to form words and sentences, that is, into a broad understanding of the Gospel and Sacred Scripture, we have not completed our formation. It is certainly appropriate (for young people and adults) to know the Gospel before immersing themselves in the Statutes, otherwise the foundation on which they rest is missing. On the other hand, reading the Statutes could encourage people to learn more about the Gospel.

Renata Simon

WAS TRUTH IGNORED?

Tommaso Bertolasi speaks of freedom and rules, and explains this very well, clarifying that love is the foundation of the law. I was really surprised that he never mentioned truth, because Jesus said, “The truth will set you free,” not love will set you free. I would like Tommaso to explain this to me because I do not understand why truth was ignored.

Thank you for your question. Certainly, a comprehensive discussion of freedom should address the complex issue of truth. My intention was rather to suggest some points for reflection on the relationship between freedom and mutual love as the basis of the Statute of the Focolare Movement. Bearing in mind that neither the idea of freedom nor that of truth are present in all cultures and that, where they are present, they are approached in a whole range of ways, we can perhaps say the following. The Latin West inherits the Roman *veritas* as correctness, as *adaequatio* to the thing. With modernity, truth becomes what is measurable, experimentally verifiable; with post-modernity, truth becomes what “I say, here and now”. The New Testament gives us another truth, which coincides with each person's personal encounter with the Risen One. It is He who liberates. Deconstructing the Latin concept and reconstructing it from the New Testament would make the answer clearer. With the few minutes in which I had to speak, I had to decide, and that means cutting (*de-caedēre*). I invite you to study and write about freedom and truth, it could be a contribution to the reflection that I omitted.

Tommaso Bertolasi

FRAGILE OR SOLID STATUTES?

You stated that the Statutes and Regulations of the Focolare Movement, being based on mutual love and fragile love (Jesus Forsaken), are fragile. However, it should also be said that, paradoxically, it is this fragile foundation that makes the Focolare statute solid. What do you think?

I don't think so. To place as the basis of a statute a premise that in and for itself cannot be normative does not compromise its solidity. For if the premise is lacking, what rests on it cannot be lived as is required. This does not mean that the statutes are inconsistent or incomplete, unfounded or unfaithful to the doctrine of the Church and the Code of Canon Law: not at all. But I repeat: even a perfect statute is fragile if it depends on mutual love to be lived out, because love can't be forced—it always comes as a gift, unexpected and freely given.

Tommaso Bertolasi

CO-PRESIDENT, VICAR/SUBSTITUTE, VICE PRESIDENT ...

You mentioned that the Co-President has duties as a vicar/substitute^[1] as well as specific tasks. What do you mean by the word “vicar”, since this word does not appear in the current Statutes? What would be the difference between a co-president and a vice president?

The term ‘vicar/substitute’ generally refers to a foreseen position to exercise a role of substitution. Although the word ‘vicar/substitute’ does not appear in the General Statutes in reference to the Co-President, this does not mean that the Co-President is not assigned these duties by the Statutes.

In fact, several articles indicate tasks that are the responsibility of the President but will be carried out by the Co-President in the event of the President's absence or inability to perform her duties. Articles 100 and 101 of the Statutes with reference to the convening and chairing of the Central Governing Body of the Movement and the General Council, respectively, are an example.

Usually, in addition to exercising the duties of another position as a substitute, the vicar/substitute also has his own specific tasks. This is also the case for the Co-President, who has his own specific tasks (see Article 93), some of which make it particularly clear why the Co-President is chosen from among the focolarini priests with perpetual vows. He is responsible for the ministry within the Movement of the focolarini priests, and those priests released for complete service to the Movement by their respective Ordinaries or Institute Superiors, as well as for scrutinising the vocations to the priesthood among the focolarini, etc.

The function of vicar/substitute is frequently designated by placing the prefix ‘vice’ before the title of the person replaced - for example, vice-president or vice-parish priest - designating the rank immediately below that of the person whose title is preceded by it.

The function of the Co-President is not that of a ‘vice-president’ and the prefix ‘co’ expresses and determines the role of a person appointed to govern the Movement together with the President.

[1] The word “vicar” was not used in the English translation of the lesson.

Chiara Lubich explained this on various occasions, particularly in the fifth lesson on ‘The General Statutes of the Work of Mary,’ addressed to the focolarini on the 26th of December 1986, where she said: ‘... I felt within myself that after me ... there could not be just one person, but that two people would replace me, defined in a certain manner. I said: we need a woman focolarina and a man focolarino because ours is the charism of ‘two or more’, so we need Jesus in the midst to govern.’ This is the novelty, the expression of the charism of unity, which we find in this central governing body of the Work of Mary, appearing in Article 91: “Mindful that two people are enough for Jesus to be present in their midst, since he said: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20), the Co-President is to consider as his first duty, to be fulfilled wholeheartedly and joyfully, that of being in the fullest unity with the President, whom he is to recognize as the symbol of the unity of the Work of Mary, which he too is to serve, together with her or in her stead.

Thus, he will offer the President the constant possibility of considering her ideas and decisions in the light of Jesus in their midst, giving her the comfort of a greater certainty that what she asks of those over whom she exercises authority is the will of God.” In this particularly beautiful norm, the law shows its function as a ‘chalice’ that contains the charism.

Elisabetta Scomazzon

THE TASK OF THE CENTRAL DELEGATES

Could you say a few words about who the central delegates are and what their task is?

The role of the central delegates certainly deserves to be explored and discovered in its key function as “vicar/substitute” with respect to the President. The task can only be carried out by councillors elected by the General Assembly, appointed by the President, who chooses one male and one female councillor.

In the history of the Work of Mary, Palmira Frizzera spoke about this several times (cf. Castel Gandolfo, 7 December 2005 Meeting of the women focolarine Palmira Frizzera: The colours in the plan of God), explaining how Chiara Lubich described this role, defining the design of the vicar/substitute as similar to that of Peter among the disciples when Jesus was among them, a centre of unity.

Thus, in Article 108 of the General Statutes, we find defined the task of two councillors who “on the President's behalf, as centres of unity for the councillors of the General Council: she, for the women, he, for the men. They are always to have the unity of the entire Work of Mary close to their heart. ...” They must “be the will, the mind, the heart and the arms of the President in dealing with the members of the Work of Mary toward whom their service is directed.”

Among their duties is to make the President's concerns known to all, to remind them of her directives, to support as necessary the male and female parts of the Movement, and to ensure that the life of the whole Movement reaches the President.

In a word, then, the central delegates are the vicars/substitutes of the President.

Elisabetta Scomazzon

FOCUS ON THE STATUTES

Also this month, we quote some articles from the Statutes.

Art. 74 - The General Assembly elects the President, Co-President, and General Councillors referred to in art. 98.

It is also its task to deliberate:

- amendments to the General Statutes of the Work of Mary, which will then be given to the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities for approval
- the approval and the amendment of the regulations for the sections, branches, movements, for the proceedings of the General Assembly itself, and for the “little cities,” as well as of any other regulations deemed necessary in the future
- on issues, raised by the President, the General Council, or one of the sections, branches, or movements, after they have been gathered and arranged in an orderly fashion by the Central Governing Body of the Work of Mary.

Art. 80 - The election of the President, the Co-President and the other members of the General Council is to be preceded by a three-day spiritual retreat so that the voters, united in the name of Jesus, under the watchful gaze of God the Father and the protection of Mary, may be docile to the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that their choice may be for the greater good of the Work of Mary.

Art. 82 - The President is to constantly strive to personify the ideal of the Work of Mary reflecting the role of Mary, Mother of unity, in her care for all those entrusted to her and for all those who are called, in whatever manner, to be part of the Work of Mary.

Hers is to be, above all, a presidency of love, because she must be the first in loving and, therefore, in serving her own brothers and sisters, remembering the words of Jesus: "Whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all" (Mk 10:44).

As guardian of the flame in every community of the Work of Mary, she must be ready to give even her life so that unity in it may never diminish.

Imitating Jesus Forsaken and Mary Desolate, she will endeavour to embrace her personal trials, and those of the Work of Mary, so well that the Risen Lord will always be resplendent in her with the gifts of his Spirit. In fact, the characteristic trait of the President should be wisdom, which is indispensable for her to wisely guide the Work of Mary.

She is to ensure that the Work of Mary always strives to bring about and nourish the Gospel revolution in the world.

She is to have an impassioned love for the Church, in which and for which she desires to live.

Clothed with the fullness of Christian joy, which is the effect of unity, she, like Mary Most Holy, is to be the cause of joy for all those entrusted to her.

Art. 83 - ... Aware of the importance of the presence of Jesus among brothers and sisters united in his name, the President will govern the Work of Mary in unity with the Co-President, with whom she will consider those decisions of major importance so as to have the greatest certainty that they correspond to the will of God.

Art. 91 - Mindful that two people are enough for Jesus to be present in their midst, since he said: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20), the Co-President is to consider as his first duty, to be fulfilled wholeheartedly and joyfully, that of being in the fullest unity with the President, whom he is to recognize as the symbol of the unity of the Work of Mary, which he too is to serve, together with her or in her stead.

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