

Year 2025

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

Saturday, May 10, 2025

Outline of Lesson 5

Cristiane Ganda Ribeiro

Raphael Takougang

Elfriede Glaubitz

How to read the Statutes: some focus points from the world

Cristiane Ganda Ribeiro

- The Statutes guide and order life, both internally and externally, for those who participate fully and for those who relate to the Work of Mary. They bear witness to a divine reality, which must be understood and lived in space and time, not only on an organisational or institutional level, but in its design, in order to joyfully implement our mission, our commitment to unity.
- The Work of Mary is described by the Statutes as a *“private, universal association, of pontifical right”*. This means that we have a legal personality in the Church and are recognised as a specific group of believers, with rights and duties.
- An association of the faithful starts when a group of faithful decide to get together or 'associate' for a specific purpose and receive the approval of the Church for that mission. This is exactly what happened to us: after Chiara and the first focolarine came together and felt the call to live for unity, other people also joined this cause.
- Associations of the faithful can be public or private. When they are public, they are born directly linked to the hierarchy, to the church authorities who are responsible for their government. On the other hand, the private ones are those formed through the initiative of individuals, i.e. the faithful themselves, and are governed by them.
- When an association dedicates its work to a geographical area it will be linked to the Church through the bishop of that diocese who will have the authority to accompany, guide and even approve the association. But the associations which feel called to offer their service to the whole Church and are called “universal” or “international” are approved and established directly by the Holy See (through a Dicastery) and they will depend on it without intermediaries: for this reason, they are also called “of pontifical right”. This is the case of the Focolare Movement.
- Even though the legal tone is strongly present in the Statutes, the ecclesiology of communion is also expressed in them. In addition to establishing the norms, they manifest the charism with all of Chiara's spiritual patrimony and describe our mission, with indications on how to make it tangible. Let us approach the Statutes without fear of the juridical text and with an open heart, so that they really help us to recognise and read the Work of Mary, integrating juridical, ecclesial and charismatic perspectives.

Raphael Takougang

- The General Statutes of the Work of Mary (Focolare Movement) reflect a reality inspired by the Catholic Church and the spirituality of unity. They organise the movement in such a way that, while respecting the specificities of each group, a strong sense of unity and synodality is maintained.
- Parts five and six speak about the zones, the sections, the branches and the movements. The “zones” represent the geographical subdivisions of the Movement, but each zone is considered as the whole Movement. The Movement is made up of people from different strata of society grouped into sections, branches and movements, each with a specific vocation and function.
- Zone Delegates: represent the President of the Movement in the zone and they are a central figure in order to maintain relationships of unity both within the zone and with the Centre of the Movement. Their authority and tasks are described in detail in the Statutes, emphasising the importance of unity and communion between them and with the Centre of the Movement.
- Zone Council: a fundamental body, irreplaceable in decision-making processes, which enables the participation of members in the life and decisions of the movement, with executive advisory functions.
- The Work of Mary is like a large choir, where each ramification (focolarini living in community, married focolarini, branches, movements) contributes with its own characteristics to the unity of the whole. The variety of experiences and commitments is seen as a resource to make the spirituality of the movement alive and authentic. The sections, the branches and the movements are like “instruments” through which the charism of unity reaches specific areas of society.
- The General Statutes of the Work of Mary are therefore understood not only as a set of rules, but above all as a tool with which to live and transmit the value of unity in diversity, a fundamental pillar of the charism of “that all may be one” of the Work of Mary.

Elfriede Glaubitz

- Parts seven, eight and nine of the General Statutes contain the norms and commitment regarding the various dialogues of the Work of Mary which correspond to its *Specific goal*, explained in article 6.
- Five articles are dedicated to those belonging to various Churches and Ecclesial Communities and to the forms of ecumenism lived within and outside the Movement, promoted by the Catholic Church and the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities in unity with the competent Catholic ecclesial authority (cf. articles 141-145).
- Article 145 affirms: “The opinion of members of other Christian Churches and ecclesial Communities is to be sought whenever necessary, in the most appropriate ways”. This means that their opinion must be sought before making a decision in this regard.
- This should also be kept in mind for the followers of other religions (art. 146 of the General Statutes) and for the people with no particular religious affiliation (art. 147i). There are various examples which show how and where article 145 is implemented in the Movement: The councils of the zonetta, of the zone and the General Council; General Assembly and

others.

- The terms that are currently used in these parts of the Statutes, as well as the challenges connected in this regard, are explained. They are the terms for those belonging to the various Churches and Ecclesial communities (*aggregates*), for the followers of other religions and the people with no particular religious affiliation (*collaborators*).
- Part ten of the Statutes addresses the relationship with the ecclesiastical authorities (articles 148-153), because the Work of Mary is approved by the Roman Catholic Church as a private association, endowed with legal personality, in accordance with canons 298-311 and 321-329 of the Code of Canon Law (cf. art. 1). The Catholic Church has the task to guarantee, safeguard and oversee the charism of unity as a gift for the whole Church, and the Work of Mary - through those who are responsible for it (President, Centre of the Movement and the zone delegates of the Movement) - has to maintain this relationship with the competent ecclesial authorities.