
IN DIALOGUE

GOING IN DEPTH UPM 2025

LESSON 5 / *by Renata Simon and Francisco Canzani*



We have reached the end of the 2025 course on the General Statutes of the Work of Mary, and we would like to take advantage of this last section to thank all those who have accompanied us on this adventure. Thank you to each of you for your commitment in following the five lessons (often gathering in groups to listen and dialogue), thank you for the questions and reflections you shared, thank you for your financial contributions, and thank you for your patience in the face of the minor inconveniences you may have encountered.

We would also like to add a special thank you to all those who made this course possible: those who gave the five lessons; the communications team who took care of directing, filming, and editing; the translation team who made it possible to transmit the videos simultaneously in five languages. There were people who provided other translations and editing in additional languages (available on INDY); the formation team who worked to put together the course...

We also want to remind you to fill out the evaluation form that you will find both on the website and on YouTube. This will help us plan future courses.

Let's continue our journey together in this jubilee year and in preparation for the Assembly.

Finally, here are the answers to the questions you sent us.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD “CHARISM”

In her presentation, Cristiane often used the word “charism”. Why does this word appear so rarely in the text of the Statutes and also in the Code of Canon Law? Yet it seems to be a key word in relation to our nature as an association...

In fact, the Code of Canon Law does not explicitly mention the word charism, since it is a legal text. It limits itself to presenting universal law, that is, the norms that apply to the whole Church, and to giving indications on “particular law,” which is the set of specific norms of an ecclesial group. Whereas Canon Law expresses universal law, the Statutes express the particular law specific to each association. These are texts that contain rich ecclesiological content, as I said, but “dressed up as norms,” and therefore do not use theological or pastoral language. Canon 304 §1 states that:

“All associations of Christ's faithful, whether public or private, by whatever title or name they are called, are to have their own statutes. These are to define the purpose or social objective of the association, its centre, its governance and the conditions of membership. They are also to specify the manner of action of the association, paying due regard to what is necessary or useful in the circumstances of the time and place.”

Although this Canon does not use the term “charism,” it mentions the purpose of the association, its governance, the conditions for membership, its mode of action, and its necessity or usefulness in time and place. In practical terms, it refers to what the association brings as its core and its specific focus, its identity, its way of acting, and the specific contribution it wants to bring to the Church. And what does all this represent? Its charism.

When we think of the charism of the Work of Mary, we are talking about a rich spiritual heritage, given by the Holy Spirit to Chiara over the course of decades. It is just one word that actually expresses a whole, a totality.

For this reason, in the Statutes of the Work of Mary, in addition to a series of legal provisions (how it is organized, how it makes decisions, how it manages its assets, etc.), its charismatic foundations are also outlined. They are presented one after the other, until they form a whole, without however using the term “charism.”

It is as if one could read the word “charism” between the lines when the Statutes speak of the spiritual heritage of this association: the seven aspects, the twelve points of the spirituality, the dialogues, and so on. All these elements together constitute the charism and are presented in the statutory text in practical, predominantly legal, and less theological language.

Cristiane Ganda Ribeiro

SUBSIDIARITY

Raphael explained to us how the entire Movement is present in every zone. One term that does not appear in the Statutes is the word “subsidiarity.” How is this concept expressed in the Statutes, in the relationship between the zones and the Centre?

Article 11 of the General Statutes of the Movement states: “The Work of Mary is organized into zones. Each zone is formed by the Work of Mary present in a given region. Each zone is established according to the norms of art. 115 and has its own governing organs which are under the jurisdiction of the Central Governing Body of the Work of Mary (see art. 97, 117-122).”

This article emphasizes that in every geographical area (and therefore in every zone), the entire Work of Mary is present, even if not all sections, branches, and movements of the Movement are represented. It will be a matter of the maturity of the Movement in that place, but no special action will be necessary to bring about and develop realities that are not yet present, because they are already potentially contained in what those who belong to the Movement in that zone are doing.

On this basis, the question of subsidiarity between the Centre and the zones is at the heart of an ongoing dialogue between these two entities, especially since the death of Chiara Lubich. It is increasingly evident, in fact, that only in full communion can each person embody the Ideal, taking into account the specific contexts of each place, but at the same time without being detached from this family spread throughout the world, which wants to respond in unity to the questions posed by today's world.

Even though the Statutes do not literally use the word subsidiarity, articles 117 to 125 make it clear how this is lived between the Centre and the zones, with a series of tasks delegated to the two zone delegates and the Zone Council. For example, the zone delegates appoint those responsible for the zonette as a task entrusted to them, and the approval of the zone's annual budget is the responsibility of the joint zone council (Article 123), under the guidance of the two zone delegates.

Raphaël Takougang

WHAT IS BLOCKING US?

Elfriede mentioned that during the drafting of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, a new canon was proposed that would have allowed non-Catholic Christians to be members of a Catholic association, but the proposal was not accepted. Could you tell us more about this? What were the obstacles?

The question of whether Christians who do not belong to the Catholic Church can be members of a Catholic association was discussed several times in the preparatory commission for the revision of the Code of Canon Law which took place between 1977 and 1982. All the discussions and minutes of the meetings of the members of both the preparatory and the revision commissions of the Code of Canon Law are collected in the journal entitled *Communications*.

Summarizing the work of the preparatory commission, it can be said that there were always conflicting opinions. Some proposed that non-Catholics could be “members and guests” without voting rights. Others were afraid that non-Catholics could assume positions of authority in a Catholic organization - and therefore over its Catholic members - thus calling into question whether it would still be a Catholic association. Others emphasized that Catholic doctrine and faith must be preserved and not endangered.

The 1977 draft provided for non-Catholic Christians to be members of both public and private associations. In 1980 and 1982, the possibility of non-Catholic Christians joining was thought to be permissible only in private associations and under certain conditions; there was concern that if non-Catholic Christians were equal members (with full voting rights) and outnumbered Catholics, they could take over the management of the association. This would have raised the question - I repeat - of whether it could still be defined as a Catholic association. Furthermore, it would have been necessary to clarify who would be the competent authority to determine that non-Catholic Christians would not distort the association and even compromise the Catholic faith.

The latest version of the draft was completed in December 1982. On January 25, 1983, John Paul II promulgated the new Code of Canon Law, but canon 307 § 4 of the 1982 draft, which dealt with the membership of non-Catholic Christians, was no longer present in either the current Latin Code or the Eastern Code of the Catholic Church.

Searching the archives of the Pontifical Commission for the drafting of the Code, there is no explanation as to why the proposed canon is no longer mentioned: therefore, we do not know what further reasoning led to the deletion of this canon. It should be noted, however, that the Code of Canon Law did not explicitly prohibit non-Catholics from belonging to private associations in the Catholic Church.

The question underlying this discussion is whether the Work of Mary is a Catholic institution (meaning approved by the Roman Catholic Church and following its canonical norms) or an ecumenical institution (meaning an expression of various Churches and therefore with a government made up of people from those Churches or alternating authority among members of various Churches). It is clear that the Work of Mary is a Catholic institution, but one that is open to membership for people from different Churches in the forms provided for by Canon Law in each historical period.

Elfriede Glaubitz

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LAW

I wonder: if we are a private association of the faithful (and not, for example, a classical order), why does Canon Law have such an important role for us? I ask this question thinking about the distinction between members, aggregates... It's not very clear to me.

This year we are studying and looking in depth at our General Statutes, also in view of the General Assembly of the Work of Mary that will take place next year. One of the tasks of the General Assembly is “amendments to the General Statutes of the Work of Mary, which will then be given to the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities for approval” (art. 74). This is why we need to be very familiar with our Statutes.

Chiara once said that when we do apostolate, we should not talk so much about our structures, our rules, etc., because they are like a skeleton: what is important is life. But in another context, she said that the Statutes are a snapshot of the Work of Mary today, a snapshot of how the Church sees us today.

And it is precisely the Catholic Church that requires and invites every Christian community, every religious order, every ecclesial association and movement born within the Catholic Church, to describe its nature, its purpose, its spirit, the specific goal for which it lives, its structure and composition, the people who belong to it, its structure with its various branches, its government, etc., because it is a gift from God to the Church and to humanity and must be recognized as such. This is the “description” of the Constitutions for religious orders and the Statutes for associations.

We are recognized as a Catholic association, but we are not a simple association within the Church: we are an “ecclesial movement,” a new form of aggregation within the Catholic Church, not yet contained, expressed, and reflected in the legislation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law. For ecclesial movements within the Catholic Church, both the rules for associations, as mentioned in the first article of the Statutes, and, by analogy, the rules for consecrated life apply.

Although lay people have been allowed to gather and associate in the Catholic Church since the last century, ecclesial movements - to which lay people, women, men, young people, children, the elderly, men and women religious, priests, deacons, bishops, consecrated and non-consecrated persons belong - are still a new reality in the Church.

Furthermore, in our movement there are non-Catholic Christians who live together with us Catholics in the focolares, in the nuclei and in the gen units. They participate in the same charism and live the same vocation in the sections or branches of the Movement for the fulfilment of “that they all may be one.” Chiara always wanted non-Catholic Christian members to be considered “members” in the Statutes as well, but up until now they are legally considered “aggregates” and not “members.”

Taking into account the principle of law that states that “life precedes the law,” it is now up to us to express this reality that we live, in legal form and always with the consent of the Catholic Church, so that Chiara's desire that our non-Catholics be recognized as members in the Work of Mary may be fulfilled. This is also expressed in a motion of the 2021 General Assembly, and current Canon Law can help us to ensure that the reality and the photograph of the Work of Mary are complete. This desire is also evident in the efforts of the various members who have authority within the Work of Mary who, beginning with Chiara, have done everything possible to include the baptized of the various Christian Churches in the life of the Movement.

Elfriede Glaubitz

FOCUS ON THE STATUTES

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

Art. 1 - The Work of Mary or Focolare Movement is a private, universal association of the faithful, of pontifical right, given juridic personality according to can. 298-311 and 321-329 of the Code of Canon Law (CIC), established according to the norms of the Catholic Church and of these General Statutes approved by the Holy See.

These Statutes contain the norms of life and of government for all the persons who are part of the Work of Mary.

In their application to the persons who are part of the Focolare Movement, the Statutes take into account the different levels of participation in the Work of Mary. Persons adhering to the Work of Mary as members or adherents (see art. 17-18), can live fully the articles regarding the spirituality (see art. 1-9 and 23-72). Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities live the spirituality inasmuch as the differences in Christian faith and in the praxis of their single Churches and ecclesial Communities will allow (see art. 20 and 141-145).

On the basis of a shared religious foundation, believers of other religions are also a part of the Work of Mary, living its spirit in varying degrees (see art. 21 and 146).

Persons with no particular religious affiliation are also a part of the Movement and wish to share its goals, insofar as their conscience allows, by practicing unconditional love and respect toward every neighbour and basing their actions on a spirit of fraternity (see art. 22 and 147).

Art. 16 - It is possible to be part of the Work of Mary in the following ways:

- Catholic Christians may be part of the Work of Mary as “members” or as “adherents” (see art. 17 and 18).
- Christians belonging to other Churches and ecclesial Communities may be part of the Work of Mary as “aggregates” (see art. 20).
- Followers of non-Christian religions and persons with no particular religious affiliation may be a part of the Work of Mary as “collaborators” (see art. 21 and 22).

Art. 115 - A zone is the Work of Mary (Focolare Movement) present in a given region...

Art. 118 - The two zone delegates:

1. represent the Work of Mary (Focolare Movement) in the zone
2. maintain the relationship of unity between the zone and the Central Governing Body, and within the zone itself. They are to ensure that every activity and every relationship has the strongest unity at its basis
3. have authority, under the jurisdiction of the President, over the respective men's and women's ramifications of the Work of Mary in the zone, in accordance with what is set forth in the individual regulations, with the exception of the branch of the Bishops, Friends of the Movement maintain and foster the growth of unity among persons who are part of the Work of Mary and among the various ramifications in the zone, respecting the distinctions provided for in the individual regulations ...

Art. 126 - The zonette

If the Work of Mary, in the region entrusted respectively to a men's focolare and to a women's focolare, is sufficiently developed in its branches and in its movements, the persons responsible for the focolare centres may be entrusted by the two zone delegates of the Work of Mary to be those responsible for a *zonetta* of the entire Work of Mary in that region, as previously agreed upon with the councillors for the "Great Zone" to which they belong, and with the agreement of the President of the Work of Mary.

Those responsible for the *zonette* are part of the Zone Council and have the task of coordinating the various expressions of the Work of Mary present in the area entrusted to them and to carry out those decisions taken in the Zone Council that apply to the *zonetta*.

In order to accomplish this, those responsible for the *zonetta* employ the collaboration of the *zonetta* council, which is formed, in as much as possible, in a similar manner to the Zone Council (see art. 123).

For the activities involving both men and women, the two people responsible of the *zonetta* will work with the collaboration of the two councils meeting in a joint council.