



FORMATION NOTEBOOKS
“ The Guanellian Spirit ”

Notebook n. 2

Dear Confreres, Sisters and Lay Guanellians,

I present this second training handbook to your attention and study. The theme dealt with, after that of last year's - Charisma, is: The spirit of Don Guanella. How the Founder was able to interpret and respond to the gift of the charism of charity received. The external models and aspirations, feelings, inner revelations that characterized him in the history of his life.

But "Spirit" is also our Guanellian response, both at the community and personal level, of the gift of the charism received in our turn by the Spirit. It was not a bureaucratic handover between the Founder and us, but a personal revelation of the Spirit to each one of us: our Constitutions point out very well in n. 2: "To us also the Spirit participates in the grace and the evangelical inspiration of the Founder to continue his ministry of charity in the Church". Our welcoming the charism, knowing it, tasting it and transforming it in response to God through a concrete living experience and a spiritual style of relating to the Lord.

I thank don Fabio for this second contribution of reflection that he gifts to our congregation, after his last year's contribution on charism. The discussion is very broad and varied. It starts with a clear definition of "Spirit", it is analyzed in the life of the Founder, grasping his capacity and originality of response to the request of God, it is discerned in the stages of his human and religious growth and in the contributions received from the beautiful and rich figures of saints have embellished his time.

Now it remains for us the good will to assimilate this journey of his experience and then make it a concrete application for our life. It is not a matter of copying or redoing, it is a matter of taking inspiration, how to connect to the wavelength of the Founder to listen, welcome and live how much the same Spirit, on that wavelength, says and asks us today. With Don Guanella today, but not like Don Guanella! Don Fabio says well: the charism is a grace of God to which the recipient must correspond. How to correspond is what we call the spirit of a person. Don Guanella typically formulated his answer, now it is up to each one of us to build our own. It is an expression of great comfort of Don Fabio Ciardi, an expert scholar of the charism and spirit of the Founders: it has always been said that a superior general is the guardian of the charism. No! Every single member of a religious family is the guardian of the charism, living in fullness and originality, his response to the proposal of the Spirit.

At the doors of the Christmas feasts, I wish each confrere this ability: be a creative and original response to the gift that the Spirit has given you. Enrich our religious family with your witness and ability to express the charism with the pride of your belonging and with the novelty and freshness of your loyalty.

I end by sharing with you also the good wishes of our holy Founder at Christmas of 1908: "On the occasion of the upcoming feasts of Holy Christmas, the priest Luigi Guanella participates in the Servants of Charity his satisfaction for that zeal that he seems to find in them, to the greater glory of the Lord, to his own sanctification, to the better consolidation of the

Institute. And he enjoys the soul of expressing his joyful hopes for a more prosperous future
"(Circular Letters SdC, SpC, 1375, III).

Wishes!

Rome, November 30, 2019

Fr. Umberto

SPIRIT OF DON GUANELLA

The mustard seed

After reflecting on the charism of Fr Guanella and the Guanellians in the handbook published last year, this year we consider what usually goes under the expression "spirit of the Founder" or "spirit of the Congregation". Being the two words - charism and spirit - correlative terms, we will be able to understand well the second if the first is clear and assimilated: charisma and spirit are among them as a question and answer, as offer and acceptance. But between them they are also a beginning and a continuation, like birth and growth; the spirit is adherence to a proposal, the full use of a gift. On purpose I will avoid a text full of quotations and references to facilitate a fluent reading. The purpose of this booklet is not the scientific research, but possibly a clear synthesis towards a tasty acquisition. In the first part I offer a frame of reference for being able to start a discourse on the spirit and, in the second part, I will try to propose a personal reading of the Founder's adventure before God.

Today, more than a century later, we possess sufficient material for a sure understanding: not only the material already known to our fathers of the first hour (Mazzucchi, Bacciarini ...) and the second hour (Tamborini, Preatoni, Giampedraglia, Beria, Pellegrini ...), but all the sources relating to the Founder and the Congregation with modern research and reading tools that facilitate and complete the picture. I think of the extraordinary possibility of being able to study with the intratext method on the writings and the epistles (correspondence), as well as the precious instrument of historical volumes published since the foundation of the Study Centre until today, in the last forty years, and cured by the greatest scholars of the Founder, most of them alive.

My aim is not to bring new water, seen that for a discussion on the spirit of Don Guanella we have two texts dated but so sure that for us Guanellians they are worth like the Bible: the report that Don Attilio Beria gave to the Special Chapter of 1969/1970 ("Spirit and Charisma") and the masterly framework offered on the Spirit of the Founder by Don Piero Pellegrini in the unique issue of the newsletter Information of the Province of Northern Italy (n.2). These two texts offer a clear summary for those who want to understand the logical connections of Don Guanella's thought but also a good track for those who want to deepen every single point. Nothing to add it would carry water to the sea.

I will not present a scientifically articulated manual, first of all because we are talking about inner life, which escapes precise and detailed radiographs and then to respect the Founder: when he wants to question himself on his journey, Don Guanella almost always answers in narrative form, with stories and descriptive and informative sentences. To talk about God and his work in him, he does not build theories, he does not elaborate doctrines, he does not list divine attributes. Don Guanella is convinced that God is present in his walking, acting, speaking, leaves clues, makes himself visible, pushes, brakes, clarifies; and it is only in this journey that one knows and meets Him. For this reason he will write and dictate his memoirs several times and a large part of his production is autobiographical, because he is convinced that his adventure is a story of revelation and appointments. Even the regime of faith remains

marked: for him to believe is to see the works of God who provides for him and his creatures. So that often Don Luigi condenses his faith in synthetic, proverbial, often short but dense and precise sentences. The origin of the ambient of these expressions is undoubtedly the faith learned in the family, matured in the seminary, perfected with the exercise of the ministry and the meetings of life, the readings, the tests. All his expressions focus on the action of God and the human wagging around God's action. "Man shakes himself and God leads him" he will say countless times.

We have already interrogated about his path before God, about his vocation, we could say, dealing with the theme of the "charism", but from the first point of observation: who is God in Don Guanella, how He reveals himself to him, what does he ask, how he educates him, which profile of approximation to Christ proposes him, by which ways He asks him to pass, which of his children he entrusts to him. We interrogated ourselves about the "formula" of faith in Don Guanella, about his theology, concluding that God is Father, provides for His children, especially for those who are alone ...

Now the other side is: how Don Luigi responded to this impulse of God, what he learned, what method of approach he had towards Him, he slowly elaborated.

This is what we usually mean by "spirit".

They met, loved, clashed, understood, learned to move and to sense the desires of his Lord. What he lived, assimilated and handed down from that experience and that we have enucleated and theorized over the years could be defined 'Guanellian spirituality', with an expression that would perhaps be allergic to Don Guanella, but that is useful when we must intend each other with a common language. From his "spirit" our "spirituality". We will see that Don Guanella is not the initiator of a spiritual school, but his way of answering the call may suggest a spiritual path, a method of relating: the style of prayer, worship, devotion; but also the consequences and the relapse of all this in life and choices.

This we mean by Guanellian spirituality. The sources, writings, life and testimonies about him are useful sources to outline their features; Very privileged sources are two lines of research: his spiritual guide on souls, such as Sister Chiara Bosatta, and the biographies of the saints, both the domestic ones of the saints of the house, and those popularizing the great champions of Christian life. Because in these two moments we grasp it in the act of guiding others towards holiness or of perceiving the path of holiness of others. And that's when he leaves his trace. We will briefly mention this at the end of our reflection on his spirit, trying to answer the question: in what sense can we speak of "Guanellian spirituality"?

FIRST PART:

The spirit of Don Guanella and of the Congregation

The spirit

An "adventure" similar to the term "charisma" has come to the term "spirit", a use that is often improper and confused, indicating very different concepts with the same word. Through last

year's handbook we tried to clarify: "the terms charisma, spirit, mission are often confused and still confuses, as if they indicated the same reality and were interchangeable. To clarify: the grace that is the charism must correspond because grace requires, by its nature, the correspondence of the one who receives it and the pastors who must discover and help the development of the charisms. Now the person's response to the gift of God which is the charism is what we call "spirit", so in our case the spirit of the Founder is the typical way in which Don Guanella adhered to the gift of God, putting this into play all his life ".The word "spirit" is obviously multi-semantic and if one studies the history of its use and its concept one has an idea of the vastness of notions in which we enter, but fortunately, both in the history of religious life and in the use of don Guanella, this term has a fairly clear value, when it refers to a founder and a religious family."Spirit" of someone is his soul, as a complex of intellectual, sentimental and psychological qualities and characteristics, the set of fixed points of his thought and action, the goal of his fixed desires; in short, the returning points of his teaching, the most used words of his speeches, the fixation of his activity, the usual method of relationships and behaviour constitute the "spirit" of a person. Today we would say: the set of typical and unmistakable characteristics. Let us not forget that these characteristics are not in a confused mode and mixed in the person, but are made united and logical by the power of the charism; that is, the grace of God polarizes and unifies all the dimensions of a person (and so it should be for the Congregation) around a dominant idea, the charism precisely. It seems evident that it is different to speak of the 'spirit of Don Guanella' and of the 'spirit of the Congregation': in the first case the space is precise and quite limited, in the second it is seen that we can only sketch, the spirit of the Congregation, also feeds on the spirit of each of its members and therefore is open to future developments, being two realities charism and spirit it is living, moving and growing. Naturally the spirit of the Congregation, due to the laws of genetics, can develop only starting from the spirit of the founder, of which he is a creature, a branch.

Let us say immediately the fundamental thing: both Fr. Guanella and the Church in his repeated post-consular interventions insist on a key point for the life of the congregation, fidelity to the origin. In other words, the congregation is a living and expanding reality, but we try to ensure that the expansion does not betray the original gene and we become something else or the opposite of what we are called to be by vocation.

To conclude this introductory part it seems to me enlightening the word of Don Beria, always masterful and unsurpassable, in his definition of 'spirit', which we find in the most important text of our Guanellian literature, the famous outline of the report he prepared for the Chapter of 1969-1970 on the renewal of our Constitutions:"Every person as a result of gifts of nature and grace, of the educational work, of the influences suffered by time and the situations of his life, has a particular spirit which is his way of life, his attitude-behaviour in front of God, to men, to himself, in every event and in the continuity of his life. "

The spirit of Don Guanella and of the Congregation

A smooth and reasoned synthesis of the spirit of the Founder and of the Congregation, we find it in the eight articles that are at the beginning of our Constitutions, immediately after the first eight on the charism, from 9 to 16 inclusively. In them it is said that:

- The spirit of Don Guanella was his charity lived as a filial abandonment to the Providence of God and as evangelical mercy towards the brothers;
- The source of our spirit is the revelation of the Heart of Christ pierced on the Cross and present in the Eucharist, which tells us how much and to what extent we have been loved and which becomes our rule for knowing who we are and how to live;
- we live the spirit of charity above all in the life shared as a family, according to the preventive method that surrounds people with love so that they develop in good and are protected in evil;
- The Guanellian spirit is therefore expressed in the trusting familiarity with God and in the mercy that we know how to live, through the well-known program of "praying and suffering". Intense relationship with God and dedication to his children;
- We express the spirit of charity through a tireless, slender and passionate work, within, with and for the Church;
- The spirit of charity asks us for a sober life open to sacrifice, which loves hardship and does not seek comfort;
- The Founder inspires us in the spirit of charity above all with his unlimited generosity: doing a lot, doing all that we can, going wherever we can, saving no energy;
- The poor are the reason for everything in our lives: for them we have been loved and called by God, for them like Jesus we ourselves give everything, to their salvation we dedicate what we are and have, with them we spend our time.

This is the synthesis offered by our Constitutions, a faithful mirror of our lived and written tradition, of which everyone can study and research deeply.

From his part, Don Beria indicated two characteristics peculiar to the spirit of the Congregation as a whole and two characteristics that each individual must take care of individually.

Two recognizable traits for the whole religious family:

- a) The bond of charity (who put us together, why, how, what it implies);
- b) The characteristic poverty (with the misfortune of enriching; a severely poor life that counts only on Providence);

Two features of the Guanellian profile:

- a) Rejoicing (the invitation to cultivate the interior and exterior feast, smiling, joyful; the struggle against all melancholy and tedium, against regret and the perennial complaint. The sad and heavy, grumpy and surly faces are not for this life);

b) Freedom of spirit (a certain fluency and ease; everyone arrives at that degree of holiness and offer to which he can, by knowledge, by virtue and by grace. Not a single measure for all: each one expands as it can and everyone comes to the maximum when he has given everything).

In our literature we find countless times the expression on the Founder's lips: "the spirit of the house", "the spirit of the Institute", "the spirit of this Little House" ...

In a decisive text of the origins, perhaps the most characteristic that we possess in its genre, 'Maximum of spirit and method of action', Fr. Guanella says: "It matters, more than it appears at first sight, to know how to regulate oneself according to the spirit of one's own institution, because without it, it would be terrible for the institution itself. It is easy to understand that a person, as an institution, if guided by a righteous spirit and by a practical criterion of conduct, cannot fail to arrive".

The Founder will return several times to the theme of specificity, especially in the Circular letter and in the last texts for the Congregations, for example in the well-known 1910 Regulation: "*Every religious family has a particular spirit, suggested by the grace of the Lord and by the quality of the times and local circumstances, and this character or imprint is what distinguishes an institution from other congeners.*"

It is clear to everyone how much Don Guanella was convinced to follow a spirit of his own and to hand him over to his sons and daughters; it is also clear how jealous and hard he was towards anyone who tried to make him change it. There was more than one moment in which, in the practices to get his institutions approved, he tried to alter his spirit and his determination was rather to renounce the juridical recognition of the congregations as such. He had begun to study other possible legal forms that left his 'creature' intact.

Don Guanella has two clear facts in mind:

- The knot of human life is love of God and neighbour;
- The historical contingency had led to a separation of many hearts from the true love of God and neighbour.

How to reduce this distance and bring the children back to the Father? Everything that then comes out, responds to this instance which is above all theological and ecclesiological. His spirit is marked by the charism: the Father has many children, but many do not know the Father, live far from him and indifferent to him; it is up to you to bring them back to the Father's embrace, as Jesus did who incarnated to bring the human creature back to God and suffered to redeem it. Bringing back to the Father. In this work of reconstruction some are more alone and more embarrassed due to limitations of body, mind, spirit, family and personal history. And who thinks about these? His whole existence makes sense behind this concern.

For this reason we will define the spirit of Fr. Guanella that particular way of responding to the call which is above all the fruit of his relationship with God (Fr. Guanella said that prayer is "*an audience that grants us the Most High*" and in this audience everyone acts and reacts as it is, for what it believes, for what it has learned ...). So the spirit is unique, personal, and

unmistakable. If each of us has his own physiognomy, even interior, the gifts of grace find in each one their own space and produce their own vibrations. And the relationship with God is authentic the more we carry to him what we are, individually and genuinely; Don Luigi, for this reason, loved to repeat that "omnis spiritus laudat Deum", each and every one in his own way.

Of course, one could also build one's own spiritual life by using a patent of others, catching nectar in the flowers of others here and there and imitating the best things of each and everyone, but this would not give birth to anything original and true, it would be a scathing without own blood.

Having a spirituality of its own means instead of standing before God and in the world, following the path that God himself has inaugurated by coming to call us and responding to him in a very personal way, with our unrepeatable typicality that perhaps will not reach the greatness of others, but is ours : spirit of Don Guanella - it appears evident by now- It is the personal way of relating to God, which derives from his own unmistakable qualities, to achieve a certain consideration of God and his design and make it the fixed point of his life and action. This is what the family gene, the formation imprint, the demands of its own time, the reality with its challenges come into play ...

SECOND PART:

The reading that Don Guanella makes of his history

The spirit of Don Guanella from his story

After this manual introduction, meagre and obvious, I would like to propose a more contemplative reflection, in other words: if we read and meditate on the experience of the Founder before God and before the world, what is his profile, beyond and above the data biographies to all known? The Writings for the Congregations would certainly be useful, but the key text for this reading is undoubtedly his autobiography "*The ways of Providence*", a pearl to be studied carefully, which still hides its treasures. A reading beyond the lines gives us its spirit alive. The inner world of Don Guanella is almost completely hidden, but from the Letters and from this extraordinary text there are interesting fissures coming out, that's why a lot of light passes. It is not a chronicle of events, but a reflection on themselves, that is the religious experience that Don Luigi makes in those events, so profound that it reaches us. It can be told and taught, like ... "*his spirit*."

It is a hymn to the Providence of God, a text in which Don Guanella praises, laments, regrets, smiles amused, explains and lives everything before God: joys, surprises, satisfactions, trials, reflections, supplications, failures, wickedness, friendships, attempts, gross errors. He reads his adventure in a disenchanted and faithful way, he is not a theorist who starts from general principles to deduce choices and actions, but starts from what happens to him and moves around him. Don Guanella is not a philosopher who outlines schemes and principles, but a witness who tells. Tell the facts, take light from the facts; and the facts are as they are, some

speak of divine Providence, others seem to deny their presence. **The spirit?** Live everything before God, waiting.

He perceives the sympathetic irony with which he looks at the masters, his benefactors and opponents and contemplates them as God sees them: children and brothers, each intent on his game, threads moved by Providence. No one to discard. He understands from his journey that God hardly ever speaks directly, but through a thousand mediations he makes his word arrive, both straight and backward. He feels that his vocation is on foot not only in the peace of the seminary and the successful parish life, but God also calls him while he is weak, poor and fugitive. Beautiful his ability to see the continuous parallel of life: promises and disappointments, successes and failures, questions and answers. All in parallel because life is this, straight and backward.

The spirit? *To conceive how everything is grace, everything for us, nothing against us or in spite of us.*

He looks surprised at himself and realizes that it is not a privilege, but a mission. God did not choose him because he, Don Guanella, is capable, but because, in his style, he chooses the "infirmi mundi" (weak), and he is one of them. The call of God is not the recognition of a virtue or the answer to a merit, but pure and free love, in spite of very obvious defects. That is why there is no emphasis in his life history of those who say: I, I, I ... but almost as if it were a litany "*Providence dispose*" or "*Providence wanted*". At the end, what he sees is a fixed fact: it is not Don Guanella who meets God, but God who meets Don Guanella.

The spirit? *A serene and realistic reading of oneself, without exaggerated frames.*

A fundamentally optimistic man emerges who, without shadows and without suspicion, at the end of the journey offers a testimony about his robust faith, anchored to a single certainty. Only one certainty, but that alone is worth for everything: God is God and the facts of life do not deny it, but reveal it. He is always Providence, even when it does not perfectly match your expectations. God is God, and believing is not just believing that he exists, but above all welcoming him as he presents himself, almost always different from how you imagined him. At times his faith in God is put to the test, slapped, purified, but never won because it is not an empty and desperate trust, it is an act of love. For Don Guanella, believing is the first card, not the last chance, when there is no other possibility. In this way even the absence of clarity does not prevent him from consigning himself to God, as in the bitter months after the failure of Traona and in the exile in Olmo.

The spirit? This absolute confidence. God does not deny himself and does not contradict himself, Never. Remains always as Father and He can only give love.

Like an enchanted child, he knows how to read in his adventures the finger of God that had reserved for him real pearls: his mother and his dad so different, the strength to overcome the "test" of the years of training (a healthy cage for him , but still a cage), intimacy with the persecuted Msgr. Frascolla who will mark him forever, the open doors of some friends in the tragic time of solitude, the friendship of Don Bosco, the thrill of entering the House of

Cottolengo, the satisfaction of buying the Convent of Traona, the trust of Sister Marcellina and the first sisters in Pianello, the gift of Sister Chiara, the doors of Como that open, the esteem of his bishop Msgr. Ferrari and then ... all that will come: the gift of the Redemptorist Father Benedetti, the support of Pope Pius X which will allow him to enter and leave the Vatican as his own home: in short, a life of miracles.

The spirit? Take possession of the beauty, the flowers on the cliff.

The dynamic of faith in him is also incredible, towards a God who reveals and keeps hidden, speaks and is soundless. This changes his life, because he always puts it on effort and drifting, but also waiting and in the long times of mortification. Don Guanella learns that living in faith is not the effort to preserve what we already know, see, possess and defend it in a capricious and instinctive way, against everyone, but it is the opening at the footstep of God that comes when He arrives.

He internalizes what it means to be "children", through the absence and silence of the Father, the unclearness and the ambiguous signs; if God always intervenes and at every request, he makes us a waiter and treats us only as puppets, not as real children. He will come to put in the picture the famous expression: "*I thought I had Providence in my pocket*", what a naive! That is, there is a false Providence, the one you are trying to search with all your strength to orient, solicit, prevent, divert: "*It is better to wait for Providence to arrive than to look for it anxiously*", he will write in the autobiography. When unstitched, after his experience in Traona, he is forced to the worst nine months of his life - it will be his best time - he understands that God is not in a hurry and that the fatal mistake is to try to get by on their own: the promise of God seems not to be realized and one could live in the anger, the temptation to solve his problem by himself.

Learn that God, when he calls, always keeps something hidden: a patch of light and a lot of shadow (from the old man of Campodolcino, to the vision of Gualdera, to the road to Rome, to the journey to America). After many years, he realizes that several moments, places and people, God had already shown them to him long ago. Yes, but not of everything...

The spirit? *Obey the signs, the voices, the visions, the councils; do not suffocate them, do not elude them, life is full of clues. Move on, in the beginning not everything is clear. Move on!*

From the text of the autobiography, what emerges is what Don Luigi considers the move to be always accurate at any time in his life: offering himself, as servants, in the image of the Victim of Calvary. This means obedience, patience, adoration, silence. Whoever lives like this is always on the right side. The one who shouts and reacts with violence does not arrive at the goal of the one who cheats and adjusts the cards, it is not pleasing to God who prepares the throne on his own and on which to sit alone. Learning from worship: To love is always offering oneself and immolating oneself; for this reason he loves and also asks us to love the daily way of the cross (*daily cross*), Eucharistic adoration, the offering of the Heart of Christ. This is the way of the Gospel. The other is just ambition or comfort.

We should still write the page of the Founder's sacrifice: the things that are broken in his hands, the money that is promised and then denied, the ridicule to which he is constantly exposed, the murmurs and criticisms about him that they precede, the closed doors out of distrust, the continuous deaths of young nuns or the first confreres, the deceptions that arrive even from unsuspected people, his fame always affected. He will ask us, his children for the brilliant, but bitter rule of the four 'f' after having lived it on the skin, in the hardships of Savogno and in the poverty of Pianello, in the rivalries of Traona and in the frightening solitude of the peak of Olmo, above all in the itinerancy of the months of his wandering life, in 1881: Morbegno, Milan, Gravedona ... without money, without a home, without honor, without a title, deprived of trust and of minimum respect. It is still nothing to have left the past to follow the ways of God, having left Savogno or Don Bosco ... the authentic cross is to leave in the hands of God also the future, the accumulation of projects and dreams, the things well set and already under work. He learns that the vocation has a price. He, Don Guanella, carries in his heart a dream that no one likes, neither his family, nor his fellow priests, some of his Bishops, perhaps not even Don Bosco, who tries to hold him in some way. But he does not fall into the logic of the parties and does not try to please everyone at all costs. He knows that those who follow the ways of God will displease someone, inevitably. And he will have to pay with isolation.

The triumphal reading of the glory of Don Guanella post mortem is objective if we first stop on his way of the cross, at least in the first years of his ministry. The epistle highlights a man who is often 'against', discussed, unpopular, and not for extravagance or unhappy character, but to follow the ways of God, and finds himself challenged even by relatives. Between the ages of 30 and 50, he experiences the tensest season of his journey, with long pauses of tranquillity, but between one wind and another, always exposed: temperamentally seeks the relationship and relaxed, serene dreams. He would like understanding, but whoever should support it blocks it. The famous reminder of March 1885 to Msgr. Carsana, his bishop, as the emotional outburst of a man who has staked his whole self, who is paying for his choices and would like at least God to be on his side (sometimes even He seems to be somewhere else); that letter is a true confession-prayer, written to his superior, but in the tones of one who speaks with God. An hour of great purification for Father Luigi: learning to "*distrust oneself*" and "*trust only in God*". Telling no to support, to search for the security, to alliances of all kinds. He must learn to really give life.

Good does not only lead to good. This assimilates Don Luigi with time; even misunderstandings and misunderstandings enter in the game of Providence. It is not real doing good and keeping everyone happy: envy, jealousy, slander, ambiguous interpretations are unleashed.

There are thrilling pages written by Don Guanella on the great martyrdom of his young vocations, male and female, when he speaks of the "*victims*" that go beyond what is due, beyond the reasonable, minimum measures of prudence. Little male saints and female saints of our house whose life he would have liked to write and he started it, in an unpublished manuscript, which is preserved in the archive of Como, entitled "*Faithful companions*".

The life that Don Guanella led and asked his boys - they were all boys - was not an ordinary life, but the proposal of a tireless journey, a mixture of adoration and self-immolation, where one never says "enough". Nothing is far from the Guanellian vocation than the search for leisure and the tendency to be served. Work and prayer, without pause, without break.

The spirit? Lose life at any time; at every moment we are given the opportunity to save or lose our lives. Blessed are the smart ones ...

It would be curious to list out how many times he laughs at himself, as if to say: "how foolish I was!", or deluded, or naive. His mistakes and even his faults, the consequences of his intemperance, perhaps certain exaggerated positions of the early years, like the famous '*essays of warnings*' or the attacks for the defence of the truth, some overwrought interventions, the imprudence of speech and Action. The consequences of certain mistakes will accompany Don Guanella for life; almost old, for many, he is still "*the well-known priest Guanella*" that the police of Sondrio go to listen while preaching at Morbegno, to catch him in fault. What does he learn? To auto-contest. To live not only the regret for one's past behaviors (I could do better, I had to think about it first), but to ruthlessly recognize the superficiality and malice of certain moments.

The spirit? Learning to apologize and recognize one's faults, remaking the road in humility and humiliation. This puts us out of the deception of darkness that always justifies us and makes us believe that we are never guilty, but only weak or unlucky, instilling in us a victimized comforting letter that is a pure lie.

Don Guanella recognizes that Providence has acted not against him, but by taking it in his hand and dilating the stakes, widening his views, forcing him to come out of certain perfect worlds. He tells himself: it was good at Savogno and everyone was astonished when I decided to leave; I was in Heaven when I was with Don Bosco and I know that I could have given so much and I was esteemed, but I left, painfully; in Pianello it really began to go well and one could continue there, yet Providence called elsewhere; in Como a marvellous adventure was born, brothers and sisters on the same project, in the same place, but Rome obliges the opening of a second Mother House, separating Daughters and Servants; in Italy it was by now known and appreciated, sought by many for new openings, but God makes us see the mission beyond Rome, beyond the Ocean. There are perfect, successful, self-supporting worlds that must break and open up.

The spirit? God fixes the boundaries, he does not fix them. For him there are no boundaries, as long as there are poor people to be assisted, it cannot be stopped.

In his autobiography he never speaks of fulfilment, but always of beginning and often loves to tell the origins of the works. Because the beginnings are the great chair: they say everything about us and about God; in the beginning there is a unique strength and a special grace. The beginnings are the great occasion where it is seen of what we are made, for what we put ourselves into the game, what the priorities are, how much God is worth for us and this is a challenge, we must learn to start with little, and live with little.

Learning the law of the growth of things and imitating the snake that "creeps" between the stones: do not operate in an open field, but move among the boulders, with few resources. Only the goal is Clear, not the road.

Then the complications of life become an opportunity to give testimony: "*difficulties rather than debasing encouraged Don Guanella*", he writes about himself.

The spirit? *Love of poverty, poverty as luck.*

The pages of the autobiography do not hide some hours really critical of discouragement. The cure against the knocking down of Don Luigi, he found it in the intense activity, in the prolonged study, in the passionate prayer.

The spirit? *Being Vigilant in the temptations with the safest weapons, when there is a need to across the desert and know one's own weaknesses: the good to do, the exercise of the mind that does not wander, leaning on God, the source of security.* In short, a personal asceticism, which comes from experience and discernment, an asceticism that everyone is testing over time and that helps the person to know which are the "friends" to resort to when there is the risk of collapse ...The most beautiful praise of his journey before God unintentionally unites with his bishop, Msgr. Carsana, when returning from Piedmont, welcomed him back to the diocese of Como and destined him to Traona, telling him that he will find a way in that place to realize "*those foundations that I feel telling you having fixed in the soul*". In practice, it gives an impression that he is a man fascinated with his dreams.

The fascination was not just about what, but also about where, how, with whom, when ... and Don Guanella always let his dissatisfaction speak, shouted to him inside, tells him: go away, this is not what God asks you, you have to do something else, somewhere else...

The spirit? The call of God as a fixed nail that which puts you on the wall every day and makes you feel like a traitor if you give it up, the irresistibility of the divine voices and the tenacity in giving him the course. God never gave up his grip and neither did Don Guanella; this is his spirit: he never derailed, not even under the pressure of enticing proposals, much less under pressure or under blackmail. In depth he would have earned it with everyone and he would have spared by himself the reputation of being displaced which accompanied him for years.

For a discourse on Guanellian spirituality

Don Guanella simplifies our work with a synthetic reading of his spiritual directives: he will say that he has some of the spirit of Don Bosco, much of the spirit of Cottolengo, but nevertheless to follow "*his own spirit*".

It is said this way, the thing seems to be clear and understandable, but in reality what does it really mean? Of course, in the chaos of spiritual sensitivities and suggestions, those who found more congeniality with his soul were Cottolengo and Don Bosco. But it would be superficial to reduce to two sources of his spirituality which is expressed in many directions and with various characteristics.

It seems important to me to mention at least the most recognizable and mentionable sources of his spiritual feeling, those of which one can glimpse a paternity and a clear derivation, still quoted by himself. These are the tastes on which he refines his taste, these are the insights that take place in his heart and respond to his needs, Don Guanella favors them, internalizes them and personalizes them. There are various confluences.

Holy Scripture

The first confluence in the formation of his spirit are the pages of the Old Testament and the New which find correspondence in his soul and open horizons.

Tradition has established some, but the research is still to be done, the field of the biblical fabric of Guanellian spirituality is completely unfathomed and today the instruments would also be adequate to focus on it (set fire). Think, to be on the Gospel pages of the two key parables of his inner world, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. Think of the hymn to the Charity of Paul.

But it would be necessary in the future to do careful analysis and the picture would be interesting: the most quoted sentences, the favourite images, the most returning allusions would give an idea of how Scripture first of all formed his soul by intervening in the game of his relationship with God.

St. Augustine

The imperiousness of charity emerges: without God we are nothing, with God we are everything. Believing than living is loving and letting oneself be loved and, where this is missing, there is emptiness. Life often sees us fighting on other fields, completely secondary, because of the difficulty of remaining on this decisive field; a lack of charity is not comparable to any other lacking, and it is the destruction of being from its foundations.

St. Francis of Assisi

His visceral and almost physical love for the Crucifix, of which Don Guanella will often mention in dialogues with Sister Chiara Bosatta, the impulse of love towards the Passion of the Lord for which he will intensely live the journey in the Holy Land and whose spirituality he will want to imprint on stone in the monument to Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre in its beautiful sanctuary in Como. From the Crucifix I strip off love for poverty, when it is reiterated that God is the only good and true wealth, for that the rest is trinkets (*fancy things*).

St. Teresa of Avila

Finally, a figure of a woman who opens a breach in the spirit of Don Guanella dealing with the feminine world of his religious to be formed. Remains struck not only from the aspect of Teresa as innovator and reformer for the desire of offering a new face of church with new convents,

new nuns, a new relationship with God, a new apostolate; certainly the most fascinating aspect of Teresa's experience is the mystical profile of her sanctity, but a concrete mystic ... almost down to earth. Don Guanella is interested in the four stages of the ascent of the soul (meditation on passion, prayer of stillness, prayer of union, ecstasy): he feels that this must be an important component also in the spiritual climate of his congregations.

St. Philip Neri

Whoever loves God is happy, because God is joy and radiates joy. But joy as the fruit of grace. Don Guanella loves the Filipino tradition on the point of harmony between nature and grace; relatively, it helps him to solve the anthropological problem and makes him come out of certain pessimism of origin that had taught him the nothingness of man and his basic misery. Without the grace being human would be garbage. In St. Philip he finds this bond between nature and grace: nature is not so far away and refractory at the grace is likewise, since man seeks joy and aspires to smile and God, when you meet him, gifts you first the satisfaction of the heart. The most obvious trait that he has encountered God and not one of his counterfeits it is the breezy and casual style, smiling, and ready to grasp the smile of creation and to expand it. Don Guanella will find it above all in Cottolongo's house and in the profile of the women religious, charged and broken down by the work, thin, frail, running, but happy. Angelic existences on whose profile will dream those of his daughters and his children, passing between human miseries and lift them with this light grace, cheerful and far from the troubles, the heaviness, and the seriousness.

St. Francis of Sales

Especially in the binomial charity-sweetness. Whoever feels the love of God becomes lovable and his human feature is transfigured, becomes optimistic, cheerful, positive, does not dirty things and people with the acidity of the sadness and harshness, but illuminates everything with a tenderness that softens and it makes relationships fluid, it conquers hearts, it opens spaces, it matures people. At the root of the same preventive system that Fr Guanella will encounter in the Salesian house, there is this whole doctrine of the Saintly Bishop of Ginevrino.

St. Vincent of Paul

Charity as a fire that irresistibly moves to act, without pause, without interval, without barriers. Where someone is alone, God asks to be loved; those are the bare and aching flesh of the Son of God. There was no kind of poverty of which he did not feel the call and to which he did not feel he had to answer as a personal mandate. The privilege of being able to serve the poor, the fortune which can happen to those who meet them, like an open door to Paradise.

St. Alfonso of Liguori

With all his completeness of kindness against all rigorism, it was the privileged source of Guanellian spirituality all centered on the tolerant welcoming and patience, with a broad gaze and overflowing indulgence. Don Guanella above all shared its universal significance: everyone has turned to God and everyone can aim for a holy life. It is not an elitist proposal, with narrow links, but the simple and orderly fulfilment of God's call in the daily faithfulness

that which makes saints. The Christian life is not a proposal for the gifted ones, but also for "the barely mediocre", he will say in several places; they too have open doors. This will allow him to contemplate and sing the beauty of the small souls, little inconspicuous that however reach fullness.

St. Joseph Cottolengo

If the historian looks for the most obvious source of all the Guanellian idea, he will have no doubts: the founder of the small House of Divine Providence, San Giuseppe Cottolengo. In particular, Don Guanella is fascinated by the idea of a city of charity, a sort of alternative world where no one denies the right to the citizenship. The aspect that most affects Guanella's soul is the small cottolengo project of a house for all 'rejected' by the hospitals and other charitable structures: it slowly matures in him from that impact the dream of a home for those undesirables whom nobody wants. Without doubt the congeniality is also proposal about the love for the disabled in which one and the other see the world as God wanted it; they represent us more or less in a marked way in our dreams, desires, defects, but with a difference: they are innocents, and this makes them more lovable. The profile of the consecrated persons of that Turin house is also decisive, with a life halfway between the monastic enclosure and the street apostolate.

St. John Bosco

He is his 'godfather' as a religious and as a founder, a luminous beacon in the soul of the young Guanella who sheds light on all the directions of his spirit: dedication to the young, professional training, the theme of the press, the involvement of the laity, adult vocations, missions, care for emigrants, agricultural colonies, the foundation of congregations. He too, like Don Bosco, feels that in order to return to God, the Church must play all the possible keys for distant children: culture, music, art, science and of course the language of charity for the weakest of the social chains.

In summary, Fr. Guanella, drinking from various sources, arrives at the conception of something of his own. He feels that the Houses of Divine Providence must be opened for those who are left behind in life with a stimulating proposal because no one is ignored before God. In these Houses, religious, laities and the poor lead a shared life and aim towards holiness by praying and working, according to the wideness that everyone is possible in his condition. This is entirely internal life that the "new gospel" Fr. Guanella feels he must announce in his time to bring back to God the naive and refractory children. This was his evangelization, often denigrated and misunderstood, sometimes branded as a jumble of the poor, a storehouse of misery ... and which he himself described as "Noah's Ark" with smiling self-criticism. Since then we have grown, we have developed, our homes are specialized for that Noah's Ark is a distant memory, but - nobody forgets - the best things have happened to us when we were the Noah's Ark.

There is a plant of the Gospel which enchanted Don Guanella and that often returns in his memories: the mustard seed. He conceives his works as that grain which is the smallest of all seeds, but - let's not forget the second part of the parable - when it grows it turns into a plant

with branches so large that the birds can be laid and nested. It was the best reading of his "creature", small but capable of acting as a nest for many, not showy, but welcoming.

And once again ... **his spirit?** The mustard seeds. Will we be still in the world until this grain of mustard dreamed by the Founder is consumed?

Fr. Fabio Pallotta, Guanellian

LECTIO / Waiting for salvation as children of the same Father (Is 56,1-8)

Biblical reflection on the theme of salvation is characterized by God's fidelity and human infidelity. Human infidelity begins in the Old Testament in a tragic manner with the disobedience of Adam and Eve (Gen 3).

According to Gen. 1 man was created in the image of God. However, sin has even put in question this divine likeness. The crime of Cain (Gen 4) introduces the violence that attracts the punishment of the flood in the world. After the flood the nations are divided and, with the experience of the Tower of Babel, there will be no more space for the communication between them.

It is the story of what had happened in the earthly paradise that reveals us the root of such violence: The jealousy. The snake is jealous of man and instigates him to be jealous of God. Eve can no longer believe in the goodness of God and looks at him as a rival that prevents her from being like him and thus disobeys him. Jealousy leads to thinking of others as rivals, there is no more space for friendship, trust. But God never abandons man.

God has always liked friendship with man. That is why he calls Abraham because he wants to bless all men through him, and finally sends his only Son to renew human dignity.

The Lord has always hoped that man would cultivate in his heart the desire for a relationship with him and would live it with full freedom and love.

By a malicious desire, out of jealousy, Joseph's eleven brothers sell their brother to the Ishmaelites and they sell to the Egyptians, and then they all find themselves in slavery in Egypt. And God, because Good, decides to save this people.

Thus begins the first fundamental event of salvation-redemption, that is, liberation from the slavery of Egypt. In the desert, God occupies himself in taking care of Israel completely, asking them for one single thing to spare: faithfulness to his will (to his laws). This pact is stipulated with the covenant concluded on the Mount Sinai, when Javhé hands the tablets of the Ten Words to Moses for the people of Israel. Unfortunately, the people of Israel have almost always been unfaithful to these laws.

God never becomes tired of waiting for him at the moment of the return, has always tried to continue to bring forward this relationship with his people by sending his prophets, including the prophet Isaiah, to remind everyone of the commitment of the covenant.

The book of Isaiah is divided into three parts. The first part (cc. 1-39) is dominated by Israel's infidelity, by its refusal to listen to the prophets. In the second part (cc. 40-55), God removes his protection from Israel, which later finds himself abandoned in exile in Babylon. Surprisingly, in the third part (cc. 56-66), out of love, God decides to free Israel.

Isaiah 56,1-8 begins with the announcement of salvation that is about to be revealed. But this time, even if God offers salvation to all, only those who accept his proposal can really enjoy this destiny. There is no salvation without justice. Salvation is a sure divine gift, but this must also be deserved. For example, God gives to the one the voice or the gift of singing, but if he does not try it, he loses that natural potential received from him.

God wants the commitment and cooperation of the people of Israel, as Saint Augustine said: "*God who created us without us, cannot save us without us*".

Israel has obtained salvation, has been freed externally from the slavery of the Babylonians; however, returning home, does not free from internal slavery, from sin, continues to be a slave to sin: does not observe the law, does not practice justice, does not observe the Sabbath, but profane it and does not preserve the hand from evil.

Beyond the fact that the term "Isaiah" is synonymous with the term "Jesus" (God saves), let us consider this passage from Isaiah to be the basic in order to be able to talk about the coming of Christ. The Mystery of the coming of Jesus is both one and threefold: one because it is the same Christ who comes, threefold because He comes in three different ways and times.

In the first coming Christ was born historically in the world with his humble and hidden appearance and manifestation. Hebrews waited for the Messiah in time, that is, as a man present in history and not as an abstraction.

In the second coming Christ manifests himself to us in Spirit and power: this is the sacramental coming in which we find ourselves.

In the third coming, the "future" one, the Lord will conclude everything by opening the doors of eternity: his glorious return will come. Divine salvation will be revealed to all those who have observed the law and practiced justice (cf. Is 56: 1-8).

The present coming of Christ is mysterious because it is too big to understand a gesture full of love: He comes to save us by his grace. We are the "new people of God", the Church, the bride of the incarnate Word, taught by the Holy Spirit and renewed by this continuous coming, intermediate between the first, historical, and the third, final. However, we do not expect the Lord as the Hebrews were waiting for him, but rather we go to this salvation that is about to be revealed.

The history of more than 2000 years ago is also our history. In fact, the recipients of this message are described in a universal way: "the man who acts in this way" and "the son of man who adheres to this" (cf. v.2). Furthermore, we have the verb *w^ehinneh* which has the function of showing that this reality concerns not only ancient Israel, but more the current reader.

The man of today, like the people of Israel, is not generally aware and grateful for all the good, for the salvation that the Lord brings to him. This journey of the history of salvation makes us aware of the incredible love of God, of his endless patience without end towards man in spite of his infidelity.

Before the Christmas of our Lord, in the first part of Advent, the word of God speaks to us of the behaviors to be kept in mind in order to participate in the blessed destiny: to observe the law and practice justice. Although justice as a term of the covenant, it expects for obedience to the law of the Lord, these two behaviors do not automatically deserve us the salvation that is a gift which comes only from God, but it gives us the opportunity to go out to meet and embrace this salvation. Of course, those who meet and welcome this gift from above will have a blessed destiny. However, those who are not preparing for this encounter, those who remain slaves to their own vices will experience Christmas in a superficial way. A seventeenth-century German

mystic writes: "*If a thousand times Christ were to be born in Bethlehem, but not in you: you are lost forever*".

One of the greatest evils of the people of Israel is that this people is well aware of the covenant with God and of his importance; he knows that God himself will make him strong in living it if he entrusts himself to him, but nevertheless he is often unfaithful, he prefers different ways and ways of dependence, he imitates the peoples that surrounds him in dealing with more divinities and living pagan cults.

Often Israel, when spurred on by the prophets or by the tragedies suffered, manifests its pride in being the "*chosen people*", the people of Javhè.

It is easy to meet in the text taken into consideration in allusion in which Israel boasts of being always better than other peoples or specific categories such as eunuchs and foreigners (cf. v.3) even if it is maintained in its infidelity.

As if to think that God is Father only for them, not for others. Thus a sort of division was created instead of unity. From this attitude of Israel comes out the perplexity both of the foreigner (who adheres to the Lord) and of the eunuch: it is true the salvation of God is about to be revealed, but for me it is not possible!

This is the depression of these two categories of the people who consider themselves nothing, not important, before Israel.

The "foreigner" is one who does not share Israel's past, who does not belong to this people; while "the eunuch" is the one for whom there is no future, because it is sterile, it will not have descendants; its story ends with itself.

Unfortunately, this mentality is the consequence of a directive of the law (cf. Dt 23,2-9) that already existed on the basis of which the two categories of foreigners and eunuchs, being considered impure, were excluded from the liturgical community.

The novelty in this context is God's response which first of all brings back the opinions of its interlocutors to refute them. Surely the foreigners who adhere to God remain such, they do not become Hebrews (eg the case of Ruth la Moabites, Rt 2,10), but they also become beneficiaries of God's salvation that is about to be revealed.

The state of the eunuch and of the foreigner is not ontological but sociological. One is not a stranger or a eunuch towards God, but in comparison with others. We are all sons and daughters towards God. God is the father of all, therefore everyone can benefit from the salvation He has promised. He is a father who wishes to make all men one family without division (cf. CSC 2). Certainly, if God is the father of us all, then we are all brothers of one family; no matter our cultural, racial, national, ethnic differences etc. We all have a duty to live the family spirit. And for us Guanellians this aspect is even more important because our own charism hopes to be lived and witnessed within a family atmosphere in our communities and apostolic centres.

However, it is not all foreigners and eunuchs who find salvation, but who has chosen God by observing the law and practicing justice. We must avoid the mistake of the people of Israel who consider themselves better, and who are not worried about their infidelity. This is also the greatest sin of today's man who no longer has a sense of guilt for his infidelities. He is at ease doing what does not correspond to the divine will. Unfortunately, this attitude will not allow him to journey towards this salvation that is about to be revealed. Likewise, we must not be lukewarm and hopeless, thinking as foreigners or eunuchs as being close to be revealed does not concern us at all. No one should feel excluded from the blessed destiny. All of us must have only one certainty: that the salvation of God concerns everybody, even the greatest sinner of this world, who wishes to meet and welcome the Lord who comes.

For us being Christian is a privilege because it gives us the great possibility of coming in touch with the Lord, even if it is not an automatic guarantee for having this salvation. Therefore in this time of Advent we must not wait for the Lord with passivity, absolutely not! We must stand up, work on ourselves, and untie ourselves from what prevents us from observing the law and from practicing justice, from what does not make us believe or feel children of the same father and brothers among us.

We ask the Lord to arouse in us this fervent expectation of his coming so that our life may be a witness that reveals to the world the enthusiasm of wanting to meet the Lord who comes to give us the salvation.

Fr. Giscard Ebalasani

Prayer to St. Louis Guanella

Lord Jesus who came down to earth to bring us the love of the father and to be the support and comfort of the lowly and the afflicted. We give you thanks for the gift of your faithful servant, St. Louis Guanella wonderful reflection of God's love. May the example of his holiness shine

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Servi della Carità

OPERA DON GUANELLA

IN OMNIBUS CHARITAS

Roma, November 2019