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**CLOSE EXAMINATION ON THE SECONDARY PURPOSE
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SdC**

Fr. Piero Pellegrini

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PRESENTATION

Dear Confreres,

On the occasion of the Year for Priests, I would like to offer a special issue of our publication “Charitas” which includes some contributions regarding our charism. It should be an occasion for an increase of inspiration and zeal in the value of our Guanellian mission. Especially in the Asian and African continents, our Congregation is expanding numerically and geographically. This means that in these countries there is a significant presence of new vocations belonging to cultures different from the one that originated our Religious Family.

Because generations of confreres span the time between ourselves and the Founder, it is more than necessary today to resume studying our charismatic inspiration and to acquaint ourselves with writings on our spiritual patrimony, that are the labor of our late confreres, especially Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi, a privileged testimony to the heart and mind of the Founder.

Another important point of reference in studying our charismatic identity is the Special General Chapter (1969-70) in which our Congregation re-wrote its Constitutions, as requested by Vatican II.

At that time, the Congregation experienced a special moment of grace. It was a period of intense work in re-discovering the originality of our spirit. Among the confreres of the second generation of the Servants of Charity, we should mention in particular Fr. Attilio Beria and Fr. Piero Pellegrini. This issue presents some of their contributions that, hopefully, will be continued by other confreres in the future. Soon we should be able to publish the long awaited Constitutions Commentary that collects a great deal of material prepared on the occasion of the Special General Chapter.

The intention for this “return to our origins” is to treasure the gift of the Holy Spirit and to grow in enthusiasm. From this gift our Congregation finds the source for creatively developing itself within different cultures, in which its presence is established in history.

Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher and theologian, said: “Life cannot be understood only by looking back. It should be lived by looking ahead.”

It should be necessary “to look back” for a better “view” inside ourselves and inside the historical/social reality in which we find ourselves, both for a better faithfulness to the vocation we have received, and for being in tune with the original inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the Founder so that what we choose will be synchronized with it.

The texts drawn from Fr. Mazzucchi have been adapted from the original Italian in order to make it easier to translate into other languages. We are publishing this material about our charism for the reason that several young confreres, who do not know or only partly know the Italian language, have requested it and because, without it, they are hindered in their desire to draw more easily from the rich spiritual patrimony of our Institute.

I rely, in particular, on the Provincial Superiors in providing the translation of these texts. I would also like to invite those who are able and willing to collaborate with the General Council in further enriching the Guanellian bibliography with other studies and translations.

In unison with the General Pastoral Plan for this year, “Rekindle the Fire of Mission,” I would like to invite all of us to find the necessary joy to revitalize our commitment to Christ and our testimony of charity even by making use of this material concerning our origins.

I entrust the content of this issue to Mary, Mother of Divine Providence. She knew how to deal with the servants at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, convincing them to follow what the Master had in mind. May she help us to renew our commitment to living and being better “Guanellians.”

A fraternal greeting to all.

Rome, 12 November 2009

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of Divine Providence

FR. ALFONSO CRIPPA, SdC
Superior General

INTRODUCTION: THE SPIRIT PROPER TO THE GUANELLIANS

“It is written that ‘omnis spiritus laudat Dominum’, the spirit gives praise to the Lord (Ps 150) and that the spirits, guiding in the name of the Lord, are different and many. Thus, there are also many different spirits that guide, not only each individual, but also the Pious Associations and Religious Congregations” (L. GUANELLA, *Massime di spirito e metodo di azione*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 26).

“Step by step, the Lord will show his spirit to each group living at the Little House and he will imprint it in their hearts. [...] It is necessary that all members may know and follow the spirit of the Institute. Without that spirit, the Institute could fall into ruin” (L. GUANELLA, *Ibidem*, pp. 26-27).

“Each Religious Family possesses its particular spirit suggested by the grace of the Lord according to the needs of the time, circumstance and place. It is this character or mark that distinguishes an Institute from similar ones” (L. GUANELLA, *R. 1910*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 1300).

“It is important to set ourselves according to the spirit of the Institute, because without it the Institute itself will go astray” (L. GUANELLA, *Massime di spirito e Metodo di azione*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 27).

“The spirit of the House should be learned as the Lord manifests it. He engraves it especially through superiors” (*Ibidem*, p. 27).

“In this rests the reason for the birth and the progress of the ministry of Divine Providence House. Superiors should never tire of repeating it

and the subjects of hearing it over and over” (L. GUANELLA, *R int. FsC*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 968).

“The constant assistance of our Founder will be with us while we study, remember, absorb, and pass on the, already well-known, characteristics of our spirit. Those whom we form to continue our ministry must be absorbed into that spirit, a spirit that we must leave as our inheritance, wherever the Congregation spreads its foundations” (L. MAZZUCCHI, *Charitas* n. 61, p. 5).

“O Father, let our right hands wither, our tongues cleave to our mouth, and our hearts stop beating, before we may move away from your spirit, before we may break the unity of your Community, before saddening your heart by an unworthy life!” (A. BACCIARINI, *Circolare del 27 novembre 1915, Il Regolamento dei Servi della Carità*, p. 410).

How clearly Father Guanella held in his mind the spirit of the Institute, and how jealous he was to protect it from anyone who, for some reason and even with good intention, would interfere by changing it, is clearly shown in the writings of Fr. Mazzucchi (L. MAZZUCCHI, *The Life, the Spirit and the Works of Fr. L. Guanella*, pp. 147-148).

At a certain point, Father Guanella feared that in order to obtain approval from the Holy See of the Constitutions of the two Institutes, he might be put under imposed conditions that would “stifle his initiative and destroy the spirit and direction” of his Institutes. At that point, rather than changing the spirit, he was ready to renounce the formation of the Institutes into two Congregations, juridically erected, and to find another form of religious life more in compliance with his spirit.

“The Institute, thus raised up, must believe that it is willed by the Lord and in conformity with the spirit of the times, to lead society from alienation back to true love for God and neighbor” (L. GUANELLA, *R 1905*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 1148; L. MAZZUCCHI, *The Life, the Spirit...*, page 147).

SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY

Fr. Pjero Pellegrini

The following article is taken from the Sacred Heart Province Bulletin, "Information", n. 2. In it, Fr. Pellegrini goes deeper into the concept of spirituality and points out the nucleus within which Guanellian spirituality finds its foundation: the paternity of God. "It is an aspect fundamental to Revelation and Catholic theology; yet, rarely is it taken into consideration and put at the center of a given spirituality."

This important aspect qualifies us as Guanellians and helps us to carry out our mission, united with the mind and heart of the Founder and driven by the same virtues of faith, hope and charity.

At the time of Father Guanella, the effects of the Jansenist heresy, still alive and well, did not give any particular value to the idea of "familiarity" with God. Father Guanella preceded others in seeing, within the fatherly presence of God among men, a great theological and practical richness. A few years later, his contemporary Harnack, exaggerating and simplifying it a little bit, summarized the essence of Christianity into the revelation that God is a Father to us. Today, the revised liturgy multiplies references and invocations to God-Father so much that the word appears in almost all prayers.

In our time of a crisis of values (even religious), and in a culture grown cold from a materialistic technology, a return to a familiar image: warm and undying, deeply natural and human, absolute like the beginning of all and as real as the origin of all living being, is a perfect return to the Gospel. It brings us back to an encouraging view of God that Jesus himself, St. Paul and the first Christian community thought was fundamental

* Cfr. *Informazioni* n. 2, December 1973, pp. 4-33.

and sustaining to Christian spirituality in its entirety. It answers our need for security and inspires our duty to seek our most suffering neighbor in a tireless, dynamic, creative and even tender way. Material and moral poverty urges our generosity to be committed to rebuilding in the poor (by collaborating with God-Father and by participating with his nature) that distinctive mark of the true image of God's children.

We must feel the paternity of God in our deepest recesses if we want to make it our own and be able to transmit it through our own life as our mission.

“The Lord is a Father so generous that he gives his Heart to poor creatures whose poor hearts, in return, they offer to Him” (L. GUANELLA, *Reg. int. FsC*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 968).

It is a clear indication that we should bring into our prayer, our personal encounter with God, an *audience that the Most High grants us*, according to Father Guanella, an element of Christian life that is the element of our own Christian life.

Perhaps, we quickly tire of prayer and through the years our meeting with the Lord becomes rather formalized and superficial. It happens when our encounter with Him is not solidly anchored to the deepest recesses of our heart, but is bound to “unpredictable and inconstant feelings.”

A personal faith that involves all our being

Faith, the origin and source of our prayer, is not only a theory or a belief that affects our intellect, but it is also that particular ability and courage which enables us to put ourselves, what we are and what we do, in front of Him. Each man is different from the other, physically and spiritually. Each man deals with the gifts of nature and grace in a particular way that is different from others. The more a man is authentic and true to himself, the more he is able to express himself in his encounter with the Lord. It is the greatness of our human and Christian commitment, when we can personally reach the highest levels, actively and truly collaborating with God, which precedes us and accompanies us.

We may build our spiritual life on “copyrighted” material, by imitating, according to business terminology, another's invention. In this case we should be aware that we are not showing any originality or authenticity. Stealing another's “copyright” should be humiliating to our originality, to our uniqueness. Besides, it doesn't help anyone go too far.

To possess a spiritual life means to discover and to reach God, to enter into a true relationship with Him, by following the path He, himself, has outlined for us by creating us as individuals, different from others. We place ourselves in front of Him, as we are, with our gifts of nature and grace. Maybe, these gifts will be poorer and more limited than those we admire in others. Maybe, we should be content to work on and bear fruit from the only “talent” given by God. There is nothing wrong with that! It is all that God expects from us.

It means discovering that God is truly akin to us, even with our own limitations. It means that He rejoices to find in us an environment already prepared to meet Him in a concrete way. Faith enkindles this encounter and becomes a constant and restless pressure to better express and improve this vision of God, bringing it into fruition in our relationships among ourselves, other people and the things seen through this knowledge of God.

In short, spirituality should be understood as a personal way of referring to the Lord, proper to each one of us that comes from what is most distinctive when we refer to Him, – a God seen and appreciated under a particular attribute or aspect, – and on whom we solidly build our own life. Enlightened and strengthened by this personal relationship with God, we can find the will and the means to turn our attention to our neighbor and to the world, to think about ourselves, and to carry out this image of God as a mission.

We must be faithful and coherent with ourselves and with those principles re-discovered in God. It is not an easy task, because we run the risk of getting mixed up and promoting the limitations of our narrow-mindedness rather than the greatness of God present within us.

We should also add that many factors contribute to forming a person and their personality:

- particular historical periods have influence through widespread ideas and urgent problems of the time;
- family and social environments have influence through emotional, cultural and affective elements;
- ideas of God and man with their expectations, hopes, disappointments and deep anxieties also have influence. For instance, the rough people of the Middle Ages saw, above all, the human and kind aspects of Jesus, while during the era of Absolutism, people saw God as a majestic King that they must serve, no less strictly, than their own earthly king.

Even the Gospel is read and interpreted according to the needs of a given time. The practice of spiritual life is always a search for Christ, who is reached in different ways, while the omnipresent Spirit urges believers to better expressions of the infinite varieties of God's wonders.

Our encounter with God, therefore, does not originate and does not flourish on rules and exterior models, but rather on what we truly are and on the demands of our heart. Only in this way can spiritual life be an answer to an interior vocation and not a useless expression of tradition or superficial custom. Only in this way is spiritual life able to mature and to resist the inevitable storms. Great masters of spirit increased their faith through the exceptional richness of their personality.

Models of spirituality

It is a fact that very often the power of the Holy Spirit prepares souls, particularly gifted men and women of exceptional quality and great insight. They truly tower above their times and are the best expression of their greatest qualities and trends. They better understand the needs of the times and capture what is in the deepest recesses of man's heart with their answer to those needs. Their answer also becomes an inspiration to future generations. Their personality and life-witness becomes the catalyst for people close to their heart and mind, people able to evaluate their ideas and to put them into practice. Around these great "specimens" or spiritual masters, schools of spirituality, spiritual tendencies, and congregations were born. That does not mean that a person has to reinvent his own spirituality or to blur it because he chooses a particular school or congregation. On the contrary! A person chooses a particular spiritual school or tendency because within it he finds the right and the more stimulating answer to his needs, an answer that common or less gifted people could never express properly.

Benedictines, Franciscans, and Dominicans, for instance, find in the faith of their founder, in the choices and practical methods they proposed, a guide that inspires them to be that which they are searching for. They embrace their guidance because they feel that the spirituality of their founder is more consonant with their needs.

Father Guanella should, certainly, be listed among those exceptional gifts that God grants to his Church and to the world.

Before reaching this point, it should be useful to review some classical models of Christian spirituality.

At the core of each model there is always a central and outstanding truth: the particular knowledge or intuition of an aspect of God that leads to consequences which specify holiness of life and apostolic commitment.

It is the reason that Holy Scripture usually mentions at the beginning of the activity of those great masters of the spiritual life, the prophets, a vision from God that firmly endorses their characteristics and personal attitudes. This vision will be the focus and the foundation of the whole future life of the prophet and summarize his mission.

– It would be interesting to re-read the life of *Abraham*, a generous and courageous man, in light of his vocation (Gen 12). He discovered a demanding God, yet friendly to him and faithful to his promises; a God that bound Abraham to consider Him as his only priority and reference point; a God that guaranteed the future of a great nation, a nation that would be born from him, a man of nomadic life, a man with no homeland and no children. This discovery makes Abraham a model of faith and hope to all those waiting for the Messiah, that is the journey of every man to God.

– Or the story of *Samuel*, a righteous and faithful man in light of his vocation, that requests from him a service to God that has to be done at once and in totality. It is a call that asks detachment of him and unselfishness, zeal and fidelity. From the night of that call, Samuel will never miss his meetings with God during the happy or sad vicissitudes of the monarchy and people of Israel. For this reason, the prophet is caught by dismay when his people request a king, different from God: is it possible to serve others when God calls? Nevertheless, people demand a mediator between themselves and God; and the prophet, who has seen God, finds it hard to understand their demand (1 Sam 3).

– Or the story of that noble and brilliant young man, *Isaiah*, to whom God appears as the mighty “Holy” demanding holiness from his people. On the day of his call, he is purified, because he has to be the prophet of the “Holy” of Israel, tireless in promoting the interior holiness of religious practice. It is from Isaiah that the first true school of spirituality that the Bible records since the Babylonian exile begins (Is 6).

– *Jeremiah*, gentle and romantic, a man longing for peace in the midst of whirlwinds of violence, in his first encounter with God is called “to uproot and pull down, to build and to plant.” He becomes a sign and presence of the dramatic change that God, himself, is going through when, as a father; he is forced to change himself into an implacable judge (Jer 30-31). Jeremiah is forced to become a prophet, the disheartened

prophet of the sad ending of his own nation. At the same time, he becomes a model of piety to the new people of Israel after the exile (Jer 1).

– *Ezekiel* is a priest reached by God's presence in the land of exile and made prophet to a scattered people. In the wonderful vision of his call, he discovered the universality of God in space and time. That will always be his way to refer to God, for himself and for his people: a God that is everywhere, especially in the heart of man, a God that condemns a faith that is merely a formality. A new faith has to be born from personal responsibility before God. The heart of man is the most splendid temple of God (Ez 1).

All prophets, at the beginning of their mission, are marked by an overwhelming discovery of God's image, in keeping with their own personality and within a precise historical context. They are urged to live it, to spread it like apostles, and to carry it out with all its practical consequences together with God, a God that unsettles all human projects and involves the responsibility of all in carrying out his plan of salvation.

The *Evangelists* are in line with it. At the beginning of *Jesus'* mission, they point out a special revelation, at the Jordan River, in perfect harmony with *Jesus'* particular situation. The voice from Heaven announces, more to us than to *Jesus*, that He is the Son of God. This will be his "good news," his prophetic mission: He is the Son of God, and "to those who accept him he gives power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

Saint Paul, passionate man of contemplation and action, on his way to Damascus, saw Christ in the mysterious relationship to his disciples. For his entire life he was consumed by his love for Christ that had "kidnapped" him, and in his missionary efforts he carried out an unmitigated commitment to bringing the body of the Church to the fullness of perfection, already achieved by its Head.

All the great masters of spiritual life experienced their own personal and original encounter with God. Their life and mission were deeply marked. This should also be the intimate experience of each Christian.

Perhaps, we may regret that our formation was not conducive to a personal encounter with the Lord, to that special discovery of God that takes possession of our heart and guides us to the highest points:

- like St. Benedict, who discovers a God he has to serve in perfect obedience in prayer and action;
- like St. Bernard who is conquered by the sweet humanity of *Jesus*;

- like Bl. Charles De Foucauld who sees Him as a brother;
- like St. Francis of Assisi who sees God as a Father;
- like St. Dominic who recognizes Him as the saving Word.

This intuition (*God taking possession and guiding hearts to the highest levels of perfection*) upsets the human projects of Francis, Ignatius, De Foucauld, and countless others. Around this intuition, they re-organize their lives.

Father Guanella, once he had found in his heart the need of God as a Father, had to reorganize his life too. He felt and savored God’s gentle and reassuring presence, and accepted the consequences: total commitment to Him in word and deed.

To us, so insignificant when compared to them, there is nothing left but to clarify our own vocation. God has predestined and enabled us to reach Him on the way learned from one of these great masters, the one that we feel closest to our spirit. For that reason we have chosen to become Guanellians and not Benedictines. We must learn how to walk on our own way, a way inspired by one of these main spiritualities. With them, we should be able to discover God, or at least some aspect of his greatness. Once we have discovered the aspect of God that fits us best, we must put it at the center of our faith, the foundation of our life.

Fr. Pellegrini quotes from “Vocation” magazine (n. 259, 1972) some “outlines” of spiritualities – Augustinian, Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, and Ignatian – with the intent to develop and clarify Guanellian spirituality. Here we quote only the Augustinian spirituality because of its affinity to the Guanellian.

Augustinian Spirituality

“God of my heart, God of my sweetness. Life of my life. O my joy that delays its coming!” These are expressions of love that Augustine addresses to God. He is the man who has spoken more with God. After commending his spirit to God at night prayer, he was used to conversing with Him before falling asleep; resuming his conversation once he awoke. He was impatient in seeking happiness, and he found happiness in loving God. Not like us, who would say a rushed “My Lord, I love you,” while it

is not totally true. No, not Augustine; he was more stubborn than we in pursuing true happiness. "What I know is that everywhere, even in myself, I feel unhappy, except when with You, O Lord!"

From St. Augustine we should learn how to be passionate for God. Only passion for God gives sense to our life, not because we choose a truth among many, but because we choose the Truth. We come from God, in Him we have life, He dwells in us, and we are in a journey toward Him. A life without Him would be a life at the margins of life. The fact that we have reached the TV and computer era has changed many things, but not this one: that we are created to be happy with God and that only through Him we will reach true happiness. The Augustinian ideal regarding human life could be insane for many, but it is true: we are able to enter into intimate union with God when still here on earth, and even among the difficulties of earthly life. We should keep in mind that we do not have many years at our disposal in trying out that ideal. Another occasion, another life, will not be available.

Augustinian spirituality could be summarized as one idea that becomes the starting point of an endless process of going forward, of creating and trying new ways to seek and find God, followed by more searching. His spirituality is built on very simple basic observation: the deep belief that we have to love, and to carry out our life accordingly.

When there is charity, there is everything. When there is no charity, there is nothing.

Usually, in our spiritual life we fight secondary fights. We try to avoid dangerous fields of difficulty especially those dealing with a love that involves insane and impossible conditions.

During our earthly life, in each moment, we should take this step of love; we should fight and win out of love. To refuse to embrace this perspective is like saying no to life. A sin against charity is not a common sin that goes away without consequences. That sin destroys everything from its roots.

Augustine was constantly obsessed with living in the presence of God, elevating himself to Him. His prayer was, and ours should also be, a constant effort to live in unity of love with the Blessed Trinity already present within us. The key word should be found in John 14:23: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him." Thus, we become temple and garden of God, like the Garden of Eden of old, in which God walks only when he finds charity.

The personality of Father Luigi Guanella

His personality was both powerful and brilliant. His interior life was not arranged around speculative theses learned from books or superficial spiritual habits. It was built on profound experiences of life learned the hard way, through suffering. Natural gifts forged him as a man of action clearly exemplified by his dedication towards others. Divine grace prepared and accompanied him abundantly.

Surely, his religious education and family environment brought certain aspects of his spirit to the surface. Unfortunately, we cannot enter into his intimate life because, as we have said other times, he avoided talking about himself. He was exceptionally reserved. His correspondence confirms it. Only a few letters are truly personal and refer to extraordinary moments of his life. They are usually official notes on bureaucratic matters or courteous expressions to the recipient. They do not uncover anything of his heart or of his intimate life, not even where we would expect openness: when he corresponded with Fr. Mazzucchi or confreres or his closest friends.

We have to connect many dots before we get a good picture of how he reached the notion of God as a Father, a notion on which he built his whole life (Cfr. don ATTILIO BERIA, *Il Beato Fondatore Don Luigi Guanella, sintesi vivente - spirito e carisma: relazione per il Capitolo speciale*).

We should take into consideration some circumstances that had a strong effect on the life of Father Guanella:

- the influence of his family: the austerity of his father, the sweetness of his mother, the number of siblings, the early separation from his family to attend school far away;
- the strict form of Christian life absorbed in his family; Church and theological formation filled with Jansenistic influences.
- the early encounter with poverty at home and outside; the austerity of his youth; an anthropology overwhelmed by a harsh opinion of man abandoned to himself, yet possessed by a great hope in full redemption;
- the harsh time of persecution from without and interior trial during the difficult years of his life.

Within and in spite of this environment, the idea of **God as Father** prevailed, little by little, in his mind and became the principle that explained and moved all things. He frequently referred to this principle, an

instinctive expression of Christian belief. It was a revelation from God, a revelation that became the answer to the profound needs of his spirit. It was an intuition of his heart and not the conclusion of theoretical reasoning. God-Father took possession of his mind and heart. He became a guide to his dreams and later to his achievements. God-Father even became a guarantee for his financial debts. But, above all, He gave spiritual cohesion and unity to his life.

Father Guanella was in need of this comforting vision of God because of his pessimistic opinion of man. Many texts regarding this aspect have been previously collected. However, we should clarify right away that his “pessimism” only existed in the background, as an expression of what he was seeing in the surrounding environment and in the many miseries he welcomed into his Houses. We should add that it was also a coherent expression of his firm faith in the Catholic truth of original sin.

His pessimism is largely overcome by hope in God and in His redemption-hope that redeems both soul and body, a hope that strongly urges Father Guanella to pursue the salvation of the whole man. Man is a very wretched creature when he is left to himself. Yet, when God takes man under His wing, man totally changes. From this belief, an optimistic view opens up, the only view that might explain why Father Guanella chose a particular field in his apostolic ministry. He chose to serve the poorest of the poor, those poor in intellect and in spiritual qualities. For them, also, there is salvation.

It is not mere chance that Father Guanella had the most intense period of reflection when he was with Don Bosco (1875-1878) in Turin, a reflection that was enclosed between two sorrowful events; the death of his father Lawrence (22 January 1874) and the death of his mother Mary (18 September 1879). While going through the dark and painful years of persecution (1880), he dedicated the book “Let us go to the Father,” an invitation to meditate the Our Father, to his parents. The message he wants to pass on can be summarized in a few words: from sorrow and distress, we can rapidly reach the necessary paternity of God.

These ideas were part of his psychological and emotional substratum that was made manifest in his relationship to God and neighbor. Here, we find his characteristic style that was passed on to us as a Guanellian trait: familiarity, hospitality, simplicity of life, no eccentricity, no care for appearances, trust in God and people. A style that has been carried out and lived by ordinary families in their everyday life.

This quote from the Founder better explains the concept. He wrote, “Forms and expressions proper to monastic life, to solitude and excessive taciturnity must be avoided. In everything, almost to the point of guilt, it is convenient that a heart that wants to please and help his neighbor, be well-mannered, frank, condescending and rich in that freedom of spirit which is a true gift of heaven” (L. GUANELLA, *Massime di spirito e metodo di azione*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 27; English Edition, *Maxims of Spirit and Method of Action*, vol. 1, page 52).

Those are words that are clearly in discontinuity with the general thinking. We have, of course, to read them within the content of the whole booklet “*Massime di spirito e metodo di azione*” (1888) whose main points are: 1. Work; 2. Way to do a little good; ... 6. Bond of unity; 7. After our own sanctification we must take care of the sanctification of others.

The circumstances and situations of Father Guanella’s life reveal spiritual maturity, a readiness for divine grace, an ability to weigh risks and be in control, and an intensity of true self-giving. Only under these conditions, is the “freedom of spirit,” everything up until and even bordering on sin, is a true gift from heaven.

We already know his prayer style: intensely affective and contemplative, centered around the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary Immaculate, with constant reference to God’s Providence toward his children.

It should be interesting to correlate the paternity of God:

- to Jesus Christ (our brother and father);
- to the Blessed Mother (from Mary Immaculate to Mother of Divine Providence);
- to the Church: there is a meaningful passage in the biography written by Fr. Mazzucchi (L. MAZZUCCHI, *The Life, the Spirit and the Works of Fr. L. Guanella*, p. 301, paragraph 6);
- to priests ((L. GUANELLA, *Il montanaro*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, pp. 1002-1003; Eng. Ed. *The Mountaineer*, chapter 14, page 27, vol. 4.). The text has an autobiographical tone and begins with the words of a child toward God: “*Father, I want to become a priest!*” and closes with words of sorrow from the people: “*O Father and pious Shepherd, why have you left us orphaned and desolate?*”
- to educators in our Houses.

We should also add his commitment to work on his relation to God, to his neighbor, and to himself in different and personal ways. All the

characteristics just mentioned acquire a dynamic and energetic tone: every day he spent frequent time in seeking God through prayer; he strongly suggested to others to spend time in prayer, too; he was constantly open to understanding people; he was kind in welcoming people; he showed a paternal attention toward the poor; he was persistent in asking the confreres to promote “*that charity of Jesus Christ that is the first and foremost bond among the Servants of Charity*” (L. GUANELLA, *R SdC 1905*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 1187).

Here we have a concise picture of his rich personality, which was built on firm principles and open to a plurality of interests and ministry inspired by his program “**prayer-suffering-charity**,” the program that was handed over to us as a guide, a way of living our religious life.

His spirit became a charism, the gift that God bestows on the Church for a new apostolic ministry. His spirit becomes the spirit of the Congregation, the inner soul that makes our chosen mission, to address the needs and the material and spiritual improvement of the most unfortunate children of God, understandable and meaningful.

Without this inner motivation it is difficult to truly be disciples of Father Guanella. Regarding charitable aid, his practical choices were solidly built upon God and upon human nature, and were logically inspired by factual situations. Of course, his logic was the logic of faith. The same should be said of us. To possess the Guanellian vocation means to be open (by nature and by grace) to these inner dispositions, to these choices and attitudes, that enable us to make the same spiritual journey as the Founder with a conviction that originates from a consonance to his principles and beliefs.

Because time, more and more, separates us from the origins, studying the spirit of the Congregation can become not only a pleasant rediscovery of the personal and intimate events of our Father, but also a necessary connection to the true wellspring. It is necessary to know our spirit so that the heart of our Guanellian religious life does not wither among discussions and planning, or even in the midst of the constant scientific progress that affects our work in assisting those in need.

The first part of the new **Constitutions** (C 1-16) was arranged around these premises. They quote passages of the Founder almost literally, sometimes shortened, or are taken from the writings of Fr. Mazzucchi, especially those regarding the spirit of the Founder. The paragraphs resemble a lens through which our eyes can see how we are relating to the

Gospel in our everyday life, a gospel for us interpreted and put into practice by the Founder. There is no doubt that the interpretation, though summarized into the main points (**God is a Father – Prayer – Suffering – Charity**), is the one that perfectly adheres to the heart of the Gospel.

Confront the prologue “*Ausculata, fili*” at the beginning of St. Benedict’s Rule, if you like. It is evident that the monk’s perspective, in listening to the abbot and obeying him, sums up a particular spiritual point of reference.

The intuition of Father Guanella: the Paternity of God

Principles

Because of sin, remember that you are wretchedness and malice. By yourself, you cannot get rid of them. Nevertheless, by his mercy, God bestowed on you the dignity of the heavenly grandeur. God showed himself to you as a good Father who has loved you:

- through creation, by giving you an immortal soul and a body similar to that of Christ;
- through redemption, by holding you in his hands at the baptismal fount and embracing you as his adopted son.

He united you to Himself through his crucified Son, Jesus Christ, your Redeemer. To him the Father wants you to conform. In him, He wants you to be transformed.

- For this reason, Jesus Christ is with you always in the Eucharist and in the poor.
- Be united to him who is, to you, a Father and dear Brother.
- Let yourself be led totally by him, and you will see the miracles of his divine mercy and infinite power.

Consequences

– Prayer

Because God is a Father to you, show Him your filial piety. Hasten to your Lord by all the faculties of your soul, and the energy of your body. Frequent invocations should be your filial smile to the Father. Your prayer is like an audience that the Most High grants you so that you may converse with the Lord your God. Expel from your heart all fear: love and be joyful! And trustingly abandon yourself to his Divine Providence.

The center of your piety must be Jesus in the Eucharist. The Immaculate Virgin may teach you the way to unite yourself to Him as she was united to her divine Son, heart to heart.

Recognize in all the truths and graces of the Catholic faith the magnificent liberality of the Heart of Jesus Christ. Keep yourself firmly united to the Church and the Pope...

– Suffering

Because you have been taken out from wretchedness, first of all avoid sin, practice rigorous austerities, and despise yourself.

Avoid any appearances, false pretences and exteriority.

Give priority to inner virtue rather than exterior activity. And, above all, the hard work of your everyday ministry should be your suffering.

– Charity

As the Father shows you his mercy, you too should be merciful to others, because they too bear the image of Jesus and you can see Him in them. Shower your love upon Jesus Crucified through those most in need.

With ardent zeal work hard for their supernatural well-being! Showing an attitude of great mercy, direct them strongly yet kindly to the highest levels of perfection! Be patient, however, and unhurried even to the point of giving some concessions to those who show a slower pace.

Revive their weary bodies. In charity build the family of the Father, here and now, by giving hospitality to the most marginalized poor, by caring for the least ones, by being as close to them as a member of their family, and by displaying joy and warmth to all.

Through the preventive method, no evil of any sort should come to anyone, and on the path of life all may achieve a happy goal.

Do not worry about how they can support themselves: not you, but the heavenly Father sustains his children and they shall want for nothing.

Consider the goods you receive as the patrimony of the poor that you have to rigorously administer. Do not organize your life on fixed income.

Consider earthly goods as thorns in your heart. Your poverty should teach you to trust in God and to be in intimate union with Him.

Texts

– Texts of the Founder

- A. Texts on the paternity of God.
- B. Texts on Jesus Christ, manifestation of the paternity of God.
- C. The chapter on obedience from the 1910 Regulations, and the presentation of Fr. Beria (from the paper “The Bl. Founder, Fr. Luigi Guanella” presented to the Special General Chapter for the renewal of the Constitutions).

A. PATERNITY OF GOD

If we take into consideration

- the strict forms of piety absorbed in his family;
- the seminary and doctrinal formation still affected by Jansenistic influences;
- the time of persecution and of spiritual trial leading him to the verge of discouragement;

it seems that we must admit the presence of a revelation and of a miracle because, during this very difficult period of time (1878-1886), his belief in God as a Father takes its definitive shape.

In 1880, Guanella publishes “*Let us go to the Father*,” the main text in which he develops the doctrine of the paternity of God.

The same doctrine will find a new development the following year in a new book, “*Let us go to the Mountain of Happiness*” (1881). The same doctrine will be resumed later on in Pianello in his spiritual conferences

with the Sisters, conferences that will become material for yet another book, *“The Foundation”* (1885).

– *Theology of the Paternity of God*

“You are away from your Lord and now you want to go back to Him... If your tears are the same as the tears of the servant, caused by his own debaucheries, then you are close to having your grave debts written off. Much more, if to these tears you add a drop of the tears and blood which Jesus shed on the cross, then you are completely forgiven. If your tears are like the tears of the desolate child who grieves for the lofty displeasure he has caused his father, then the Heavenly Father is already willing to forgive all your abuses, and to readmit you into his home because the Lord immediately loves those who love him” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Padre*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 149; English Edition, *Let us go to the Father* vol. 3, page 53).

“As soon as you show signs of remorse and you suffer by thinking of Him... the Lord, your Father, counts the sighing of your heart” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Monte della Felicità*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 216; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the mountain of happiness*, vol. 3, page 130).

“Listen to the voice of the Father calling you. Try to remove the noises of the world from your heart. Then the word of your God will be disclosed more clearly to you. As soon as you have heard it, hasten as a son quickly responds to the call of his beloved father and immediately you will feel the embrace of the Lord as his dear son” (L. GUANELLA, *Nel mese dei fiori*, Opera Omnia, Vol. I, p. 918; Eng. Ed. *In the Month of Flowers*, vol. 5, page 164).

“Do you remember when you tended your flock as a little shepherd? Then you often thought of your father and your home... Your heart was filled with emotions, and then tears flowed as rivers from your eyes. To stop crying, you shouted, ‘Daddy is at home. Soon I will see my beloved father’... The affections you feel toward your father on earth must lead you to increase the love you have for your heavenly Father. In the midst of the pain of life think constantly, “My Father and Lord is in heaven. Soon I will see him again!” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Padre*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 113; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the Father*, vol. 3, page 14).

“I am in your house, Lord, and in this moment I savor the happiness that a child enjoys when he returns to his father’s arms.” (L. GUANELLA, *Ibidem*, p. 173; Eng. Ed. vol. 3, page 85).

Be aware that two are the mountains of the law of the Lord your

God. There is Mount Sinai, on whose top God promulgated, for his servants the Hebrews, a law which makes man prosper as the command of the master makes his faithful servant prosper. There is also the mountain of the evangelical Beatitudes. From the top of this mountain the Lord manifested teachings that not only bring happiness, but also an inner contentment, just as the wishes of an excellent father gladden the heart of a beloved child” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Monte della Felicità*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, pp. 185-186; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the mountain of happiness*, vol. 3, page 98).

To the commands of God-Father, a son may answer in different ways. “Suppose now that three children of the same father carry out the same orders from their parent. You can see how the first one obeys only to avoid being punished. You look at the second and you find that he obeys only because he wants to be rewarded. Finally, you look at the third and you learn that he obeys because he ardently desires to please his beloved father in all things and to bring him consolation. This last child is certainly more commendable than his brothers. Consider now that a beloved child can obey in two different ways. One may obey his father to please him, without being preoccupied with anything else. Another, in obeying to please his father, may look at the commands he has received, he may admire them and subsequently encourage other people to do likewise. Moreover, whenever he has the opportunity, this child studies the requests of his father by ascertaining the inner motives of his father’s heart, because he wants to think as his father thinks, to speak as his father speaks, and to desire only what his beloved father desires.” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Padre*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, pp. 138-139; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the Father*, vol. 3, page 42-43).

“If you reach the highest degree of love for the Father, if you open up to God with the affection of a loving child and if you imitate his virtues, you will see how the Lord will be comforted by you” (L. GUANELLA, *Ibidem*, p. 119; Eng. Ed. vol. 3, page 20).

Let us look now at the highest level of filial relationship with the Father.

“Your heavenly Father is willing to give his gifts to you more than you would care to ask for them. He fills you with his favors every moment. Often, he does it in such a way that you do not even become aware of the great graces he gives you. Thus, you may not believe that he benefits you so that you can be grateful to him” (L. GUANELLA, *Ibidem*, p. 111; Eng. Ed. vol. 3, page 11).

“When a son imitates the virtues of his father, the two of them become one in thinking and willing. When they converse, they do so in a very cordial intimacy because they know that they are united in love” (L. GUANELLA, *Ibidem*, pp. 115-116; Eng. Ed. vol. 3, page 16).

“It is enough for the heart of a child to be in the arms of his father. When will it be enough for you to have the consolation of being in the arms of your heavenly Father?” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al monte della felicità*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 210; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the mountain of happiness*, vol. 3, page 123).

Within the doctrine and devotion of the Paternity of God, the meaning and doctrine of *Divine Providence* took root.

God, as a Father, does everything for his children.

The greater gift of paternity has been to send his own Son, his Love, as the Mediator that brings us back to Him. With that first gift, everything of us, in us, and around us is the work of the Father and of his Providence. The writings “*Let us go to the Father*” and “*Let us go to the mountain of happiness*” are very important for his doctrine on Paternity. At the same time, they are also important for his doctrine on the provident Love of God, Father and Son. Also rich in this theme are the apologetic works “*Jesus Christ living in his Church*” (1885-1887), “*The Glories of the Pontificate*” (1887), and “*A glance of the militant Church*” (1884). In them, it is his constant belief that the provident God governs the world and guides his Church.

It is the doctrine of the Paternity of God that originates the place that *Jesus Christ holds, as center of Christian life*, and the particular way that Fr. Guanella thinks of Jesus Christ and lives His presence in his life.

In the writings “*Let us go to the Father*” (1880), heavily filled with the idea of the Paternity of God, and in the “*Month of Fervor*” (1884), we have the texts of the doctrine on Jesus Christ Father of the same paternity of God-Father, Mediator to the Father, Revelation of the love (Sacred Heart) of the Father.

Jesus Christ accomplished His mission as Mediator through Incarnation and Passion. He continues it through the Eucharist. These are the mysteries of Christ that prevailed in the meditation and prayer of Father Guanella. In order to fully express the whole mystery of the incarnated, crucified and Eucharistic love, he found the excellent doctrine of the Sacred Heart, a valuable form of cult that the Church attributes to the Heart of Jesus. Thus he, more deeply, revamped his devotion to the Sacred Heart that was significant during his formation years.

B. JESUS “FATHER”

a) *In the mysteries of his life, from Incarnation to Calvary*

“The soul is the noble part of man and of the Christian. When the good qualities of a child resemble the best qualities of his father, a very strong attachment is established between the two. Jesus, the father of men, wanted to unite the affections and his very self with the affections and the person of his children. To this effect, he thought of something of which neither the mind of a man nor of an angel could think.” (L. GUANELLA, *Nel mese del fervore*, Opera Omnia, Vol. I, p. 1218; Eng. Ed. *In the Month of Fervor*, vol. 5, page 83).

“Arriving at the shelter of Bethlehem, the shepherds and the Magi greeted Jesus saying: *Behold our Father!* Joseph and Mary, every day at sunrise in Nazareth bowed to Jesus and with all their love said: *Behold our Father!*... Urged by their burning desire, they at last took flight toward Paradise as Jesus did from Mount Zion and, upon reaching God the Father, they exclaimed with the happiness of the blessed: *Behold our Father! Behold the Father!* The Father, then more than ever, addressed himself to them saying: *I am a Father to you and you are children to me. Therefore I will console you*” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Padre*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 121; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the Father*, vol. 3, page 23).

“The Heart of Jesus is the heart of a father. Jesus dwelled in Nazareth for thirty years, and from there with unspeakable joy he intimately conversed with his Eternal Father” (L. GUANELLA, *Nel mese del fervore*, Opera Omnia, Vol. I, p. 1186; Eng. Ed. *In the month of fervor*, vol. 5, page 47).

“Come to the Cenacle (Upper Room) where Jesus Christ is with his apostles for the last time. The next day, Jesus will die on the cross on Calvary. A father feels his heart break when preparing to go far away from his children. Had he to depart from this life for the life after, his tenderness would be inexpressible... Thus he gave Communion to each of his apostles, then he said to them: Behold, my disciples, what you have seen me doing in this moment: do it yourselves until the end of the world, for I am a father to you and you are children to me. The heart of a father cannot stand being away from his children. Now I am preparing myself to die and then I will rise on the third day. Then I will ascend into heaven, but I will not cease being with you, since a father cannot stay away from his children. I will be with you until the end of time” (L. GUANELLA, *Ibidem*, pp. 1277-1278; Eng. Ed. vol. 5, page 154-155).

“Think of Jesus, your Father, in the Garden of Olives. Imagine yourself witnessing Jesus agonizing on the cross. Ask him the reason for his suffering. He will respond with pitiful lamentations: I have nourished and exalted my children and they have despised me! What would you say?” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Padre*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 119; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the Father*, vol. 3, page 20).

“Consider how good a fatherly heart is the heart of Jesus, your Savior and Lord! He cries out constantly: I have come to search for the souls of the children who have perished! Meanwhile, he excitedly looks for them. Once he has found them, he holds them to his bosom rejoicing very much” (L. GUANELLA, *Nel mese del fervore*, Opera Omnia, Vol. I, pp. 1204-1205; Eng. Ed. *In the month of fervor*, vol. 5, page 68).

“We boast nothing other than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which there is life, salvation and our resurrection... The apostles pleased the Heart of Jesus so much that, as beloved children, every time they called on him: Father! Father! Jesus would answer: You are children to me; you are my beloved ones!” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Padre*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 120; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the Father*, vol. 3, page 21).

b) *In giving his commandments and in sending trials*

“The heart of a father is a heart that is filled with tenderness. Willing to do good for his son, he adjusts the weight of the burden to the strengths of his son’s small body... A father does not expect anything from his son other than living at home, and being docile to the expectations of his teacher. He wants him to be sensitive to the suggestions of his mother, diligently doing his chores within the family according to his abilities. The Heart of Jesus is like the heart of that great father” (L. GUANELLA, *Nel mese del fervore*, Opera Omnia, Vol. I, p. 1190; Eng. Ed. *In the month of fervor*, vol. 5, page 52).

“With a fatherly heart, Jesus as a true father invites you to: Come, for my yoke is easy. My yoke is the yoke of my commandments. Suppose that a father tells his son: Honor me, do not curse me. On my birthday give me some sign of affection. Respect your mother and your brothers and sisters, and do not soil yourself in the mud. Never do to others what you do not wish for yourself... Here you find Jesus, your Father, who to the yoke of his commandments adds the light burden of his counsels” (L. GUANELLA, *Nel mese del fervore*, *Ibidem*, p. 1201; Eng. Ed. *In the month of fervor*, vol. 5, page 64).

c) *In the Eucharist*

“Consider now that the Lord of heaven continues this admirable discourse with you. Here on earth, Jesus, in the Blessed Sacrament, reaches you with his divine love: I am a father to you, and you are my children... Here I am to save all... Come to me, my children, so that I can embrace you.

How have you answered Jesus so far and what do you intend to tell Him now?

If you do not know better, say: Father! Father! Father!

Whisper this dear name with the candor of a loving child. This will make God, the Father, love you greatly” (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Padre*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 120; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the Father*, vol. 3, page 21).

“May the Body of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Father, bring me to everlasting life!” (L. GUANELLA, *Ibidem*, p. 175; Eng. Ed. vol. 3, page 86).

“You know that you please God and you are sure that the Lord will always take care of you. The little child is in peace when he is cuddled in the arms of his father. Now, how is it possible that you do not enjoy tranquility when you lay in the arms of Jesus, your Father?” (L. GUANELLA, *Nei mesi del fervore*, Opera Omnia, Vol. I, p. 1219; Eng. Ed. *In the month of fervor*, vol. 5, page 84).

C. OBEDIENCE

The chapter on Obedience in the 1910 Regulations of the Servants of Charity holds a special place among the texts regarding the doctrine on the Paternity of God and on Jesus Christ, exemplar Mediator to the Father.

We give only brief references that should be integrated by a personal reading of the chapter from the Regulations themselves. (Note: *On the occasion of the centennial of their publication a new critical edition with detailed commentary will be published*).

– A son seeks to know, to love, and to carry out every will and desire of his great, wise, good, and holy Father. In this way, he pleases the Father and finds peace and happiness for himself.

– We, poor children, redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ, must love Jesus Christ our good father and conform our hearts to the desires of his Heart. He said: “By this you will be recognized as my children, if you will do what pleases my eternal Father:” Jesus for the Father.

– The merit of obedience lies in the way a son establishes a relationship with the father in regards to himself and his life.

– A Christian, that seeks perfection, has to establish with the Father a relationship that conforms to the exemplar Mediator, the eternal Word, who became flesh to do the Father’s will.

– Even the degrees of obedience are explained by considering the level of intensity that a son can reach in his relationship with the Father.

– When a son disobeys, how does the Father behave toward that son? The Lord keeps going after him with unspeakable cries. He waits for the last moment (here we may see exemplified the parable of the prodigal son, in which Jesus described the Father). In this paragraph the Founder does not mention Jesus because the son, in disobeying, does not assume Jesus as a model of obedience.

In order to give due importance to this text on the Paternity of God and on Jesus Christ, we should emphasize the following:

– To Father Guanella, the focal point of religious life is the vow of obedience: “The vow of obedience makes a religious a perfect man, because giving intellect and heart to God through superiors is to give the best of ourselves” (L. GUANELLA, *R SdC 1905*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 1190).

We should keep in mind that this page, relating to the fundamental theme of his spirituality, was born from his own dealing with obedience.

– Here we are not talking about parables or images that the Founder uses to teach us something. On the contrary, Father-Son is the terminology that he uses to express what he truly and deeply feels regarding his relationship with God, and how he expresses it. In the original edition of the Regulations, he spends eight pages delving into this concept.

– The 1910 Regulations also show a great conformity to and inspiration from “*Let us go to the Father*” and “*Let us go to the mountain of happiness,*” texts written many years before. Thirty years after their publication, we can, however, find in the Regulations the same doctrine brought to its full maturity.

THE FIGURE OF FATHER GUANELLA

Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi

In 1949, Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi, SdC, published in Charitas (n. 98-99-100) the following important essays that we propose here with some adaptations for a better reading.

A HEART AND A FACE * **A remembrance for an imitation**

Fr. Attilio Beria, SdC briefly commented on the following text: *“How moving are these five pages! Nothing reached such a high level before. In them we come to know the Founder, his personality, his exterior and his interior traits. Through them, we encounter his intimate features: his person, his face, his way of doing, and his very words.”*

The great Augustine is usually portrayed carrying a heart in his hand. It is the heart that was able to win over his restlessness and take him away from error and vice. It's the heart that filled him with God's love so that he could and would offer and pour its exuberant benefit on his brothers who were misled, corrupted, and grieving about the situation of their human families. God's saints are the only ones who are richly provided with truth and goodness. They possessed and possess a heart rich and fruitful in divine charity like St. Paul, whose heart was the Heart of Christ itself.

* Charitas n. 98, pp. 1-5.

I am wondering what Father Luigi, our Father, wanted to disclose when he told his first closest disciples, with a sad smile on his lips, that his heart had not been understood either outside or inside the community.

Who was the person utterly able to understand the big heart of Father Guanella in a way that could totally transform him?

The Lord gave a big heart to Father Guanella, a heart that He formed and molded since the first years of childhood:

– He made Luigi able to contemplate the beauty of nature surrounding his native valley, with its snowcapped mountains, torrents, pastures... a beauty that in the little boy was transformed into prayer of admiration. Many times during his life, he recalled those days still showing vivid affection for the Creator.

– He preserved the innocence of his baptismal grace that never left his soul and body.

– He kept him away, in his youth, from the immodest language of some of his classmates.

– During his seminary years, He gave him the necessary strength to persevere in his priestly vocation while other classmates left seminary and the vocation to join the Italian Army and to fight for the independence of Italy.

– He endowed him with an ardent piety, nourished by the Holy Eucharist, which made him more sensitive to understanding and to relieving the sufferings of his neighbor.

It was his piety that arose in his heart with the resolution to dedicate his vacations from school to gather the kids of his hometown together around him. It was a way to keep them from evil, to provide them sound fun, and to teach them the catechism. He was also more than ready to assist needy elderly in their own homes.

Later on, widening the horizon of his desire to do more good, he even dreamed of the vast apostolate of missionary work among pagans of far away countries.

While waiting for that opportunity, he hastened to Turin to the side of the great apostle of youth, Fr. Bosco.

When working in parish ministry, he carried out any sort of apostolic activity for the benefit of the souls of his parishioners through his abundant preaching, the circulation of good printed material (paid for out of his own pocket), and teaching evening school for adults and children. He never stopped speaking out because of personal interests or timidity. He

used his pen and his voice widely, courageously defending the moral and civil wellbeing of his people and their Catholic faith from the political-sectarian attacks against the Church and the Holy Father.

We should not forget his personal anguish for the many misunderstandings, obstacles, and especially the frustrating wait that prevented him from carrying out the mission of charity shown him by God, himself, since he was a child. It is enough to recall the scene with the elderly man, outside the church of Campodolcino, who asked him for an act of compassionate solidarity. And, the vision on the day of his First Communion when, enveloped in deep Eucharistic adoration, he saw the Virgin Mary, Mother of Providence, pointing out to him the needy crowds.

Finally, after years suffered in research of the ways of Providence, he was able to open many Houses for people most in need, where he would teach his disciples, by word and deed, how to give joy and comfort to those who had lost hope.

To his unshakable trust in divine assistance, he added the tenderness of his heart in rescuing the many adolescents who he then educated and formed with great love, giving them back to society filled with determination, virtue, and an ability to face the trials of life.

How many elderly people did he pick up from the world to prepare them to meet the good and merciful Lord at the end of their earthly lives! How great was his understanding and compassion toward them (except in the face of obstinacy in evil and blasphemy)!

In the sad smile of his veiled complaint, "*my heart was never well understood!*" there was his conviction that he had given everything for the love of God and neighbor. Also present was his sadness in not having found adequate correspondence, not even among us, his disciples, in fully understanding and complying with his undertakings and solicitude.

When, on that October 24th afternoon, before bowing his head and taking his last breath, he assembled us around his bed, he looked at us with fatherly love and, while crying all our tears, we understood that in that final gaze there was all his heart. We are keeping forever in our minds and hearts the vision of his face, reflecting divine light and eternity. He that "never attached himself to earth," as he once wrote, was now joyful because he had reached the much anticipated heavenly destination, the same destination that he promised to us and to all those who would follow him in the future.

The austere seal of death impressed on his features a serene and particular luminosity that was comforting to us, and instilled courage in our hearts, more moved than grieved by his death.

It was the same luminosity that enlightened his face every time he met us as a community and as individuals.

If sometimes he worried or expressed some complaint or protest, even when he had to defend himself, he never lost serenity of spirit.

If, sometimes, he reluctantly had to make concessions, inconvenient to his view, or if he showed moments of exterior impatience in order to shake our laziness and incite us to greater commitment, we found in him a constant and encouraging attitude of goodness and affection.

All the time, Father Luigi showed a good-natured appearance that was reassuring to people, but he kept to himself the disappointments and afflictions.

When looking at the Tabernacle or the Holy Host, or when he was praying in a recollected way with his usual half-closed eyes, his countenance changed into light and fire.

The same fervor and peacefulness were shown during his frequent travels by train. When he was alone, he prayed numberless Rosaries. When in company, he was not too shy to enter into conversation with those around him, sharing with them words that were usually beneficial to their souls.

When meeting a person on the street, he used to walk arm-in-arm leading him little by little to a more charitable and pious life and, when possible, entering into a nearby church.

Even his apparently strange ways of behaving and nicknaming people were welcomed with benevolence. As, for instance, when he was pulling the hair of a friend, or ruffling the well combed hair of a seminarian, or calling the Sisters “*martorelle*” whom he desired to be simple persons (“*martur*” in the Lombard dialect means *simple*), but also martyrs (from the Latin-Greek word “martyr”), or when he was addressing the Servants of Charity as “*asinelli*,” little donkeys, because he wanted them to be patient and hard-working religious.

Father Luigi never excluded anyone and never denied his familiar conversation to anyone either, not even to those who once were against him.

Comfort was always the final gift of his conversation and even of his “reprimands.” Also consoling were his ascetic doctrines and his spiritual direction according to the models of St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus de Liguori, and Fr. Frassinetti, authors that he recommended to his disciples. Sometimes, he entrusted some priest or religious, friends of his, to go and bring consolation to a group of Sisters that were the recipients of a previous harsh rebuke or some... scolding from him.

His word was inspiring and a source of good, always made pleasant by edifying stories. It was rich in faith and made understandable to all by using questions and answers, especially when teaching catechism or in familiar conversations. Even his private conversations were made pleasant by frequent witticisms and innocent jokes.

Charity was always at work in his conversation, directed to safeguard even in his adversaries their good intentions, with love for all, even sinners. He gave due respect to his superiors, especially the ecclesiastical, even when, in confidentiality, he had to state their mistakes and prejudices toward his Institutes. Though he attached great importance to the Rule, he was ready to excuse someone who was not observing one of its numbers. He was vigilant regarding unfounded or indiscreet suspicions which might fall on confreres through negative gossip and become difficult to refute later.

His manners were very simple. They flowed from a habit of sincerity. He never showed any ostentation or peculiarity. The lively and burning piety of his spirit never turned into affected bodily expressions. Though showing a rigorous respect for sacred liturgy and Church ceremony, he never displayed his body in odd positions or made a big fuss if his hands were not perfectly joined. In an attitude of recollection and devotion, and through his hands, an exterior expression of his filial trust and confidence, he manifested his total abandonment to God.

Faithful to the fasting required by Church and Rule, he hid his personal penance of hair shirt and scourge from view, always vigilant about condescending in any way to worldly vanities.

He preferred common food. He ate what was sufficient. He always refused special dishes, even after long days of fasting spent in traveling when his only food was bread and water.

He took great care not to emphasize his outstanding qualities of intelligence and soul, or marks of honor due to his status and responsibility. He accepted, with good humor, the inevitable scorn or criticism from people averse to him.

At home and among his own, he dressed simply and at times he even appeared unkempt. He loved, however, to present himself with propriety attired in proper clothes, though poor and scarce. With his own confreres (at times with outsiders), after recalling a funny story or listening to a joke, he would express enjoyment with a short hearty laugh (rarely brought to tears). Profanity and irreverent use of sacred expressions was always forbidden.

When meeting with women, he was reserved to the point that he did not allow them to kiss his hand after receiving his blessing.

He was of average height and of robust frame. He was bald at a young age; with a crown of reddish curly hair at the base of his head (he was nicknamed “*the red man from Valtellina*” in Pianello). His eyes were light gray. He never gazed directly at a person except in the last years of his life when, in his slow tired manner of walking he had difficulty, short-sighted as he was, in recognizing the person who was greeting him or walking at his side.

He walked his entire life, from childhood to old age. How much walking he had done! It was not a fast walk. It was a resolute and incessant walk along the paths of his mountains or along the streets of many cities, or up many stairs to the palaces of the rich and noble where he looked for charity, to receive and to give away until the last days of his life. He walked along icy streets or sunny streets. He traveled by train and over the sea, always under the protection and guidance of his Guardian Angel, the Saints of Heaven, and the Blessed Mother, to whom he constantly prayed.

O big heart of Father Luigi! May our hearts become like yours, filled with love for God and with charity toward our brothers and sisters!

O kind and smiling face! Look at us kindly from Heaven until we see you again!

A SPIRITUALITY? *

For study and practice

Synthesis of a spiritual doctrine as formulated in the writings and life of Father Guanella, and Guanellian tradition

People that possess the gift of a broad-minded intellect and a warm heart, in carrying out their vocation and mission on earth, offer an incentive for imitation to those who are interested in following them. Even more so, this principle should be applied to people who are spiritually gifted and ma-

* Charitas n. 99, pp. 1-10.

ture as the Saints of God. They allowed the fruitful action of God's love to work in them in a way that their qualities of nature and grace, at the service of God and neighbor, were in full bloom. Thus, they generated great works of charity and they, themselves, became authoritative guides to many.

Also our own sweet father, Father Luigi Guanella, established charitable activities and became father to many disciples. We must keep him dear in our minds and hearts; we must study him; we must become devoted imitators of his virtues and faithful disciples of his spirit. We should recognize it in his edifying examples of active and virtuous life and in the shining teaching that he has left us as an inheritance.

Studying the Founder should be a constant commitment. We should rely on the genuine testimonies of those few surviving disciples who heard him talking and conversed with him. We must rely on his precious writings, on his many books and articles, and on the Regulations and private letters written to his disciples...

These remarks of mine should be a vigorous and persuasive invitation to you all for a true and great profit.

In the first extensive biography, written more than thirty years ago, we attempted to offer in well documented fashion a sufficient view of the mind and spirituality of Father Luigi, our father, despite the rush imposed by our need to open the cause for his beatification. It was a work done in a rush that should be reviewed and completed...because much more material is available for a better portrait of his spiritual and human figure.

From what we remember of his pastoral activities and writings, we can give a good picture of the programs and ideas which are still valid today.

- 1) His spiritual ministry is made more efficient by as much preaching as possible and by abundant religious instruction;
- 2) He concentrated his attention and care toward many different groups of people; however he had a preference for children and youth;
- 3) Evening classes for the benefit of uneducated people, whose Catholic faith he courageously defended. For these, he devised solutions to solve their agricultural and social problems;
- 4) Good Catholic publications distributed free of charge;
- 5) The Catholicity (universality) of his zeal brought him to take an interest in the historical vicissitudes of the Church of his own time, and, as much as possible, in the fate of Christianity in the world, even among pagan nations.

- 6) In organizing his Houses of charity, he took into consideration everything that could be useful to the residents, for whom he requested:
- an accurate catechesis by using an active method of teaching; a solid moral and spiritual formation enlivened by frequent participation in the Sacraments, the beauty of liturgical ceremonies and sacred hymns;
 - an appropriate preparation of young people for their future lives so that they could engage in honest work and live as practicing Christians;
 - staying away from idleness; even offering activities to the elderly that made their days less tedious;
 - to turn to human sciences and its suggestions in helping our work towards the mentally handicapped. Mere assistance is not enough; scientific methods can help and develop better the intelligence and the receptivity of the mentally disabled.

We already know the importance to our holy Founder of love and faith, the true sources of inspiration to our priestly ministry, to our life in community as a family and to the formation of youth. He urged us to treasure the preventive method among youth, the same method that he had seen at work when he was at the side of Fr. Bosco, to whom he was very close and a good disciple. He expressly suggested that we follow his example.

Since his youth, mother nature furnished Father Luigi with many talents and a life enriched with valid personal experiences. Though not the inventor of a new educational system, he felt the necessity to deplore and to go against the disastrous tradition of the unnecessarily strict formation he experienced in his own family, the same formation that he later endured in the Gallio Academy and seminary. He stressed the importance of using kindness and persuasion, of being more encouraging and less disheartening, when dealing with children and youth.

Very often he reminded us of the teaching of St. John Bosco:

- walk toward virtue and piety with filial confidence in the Lord; (his spiritual master here was St. Francis de Sales)
- live a chaste life and love God; (his spiritual master here was St. Philip Neri) keep a serene and happy life by following the Christian faith and human virtues.

He condemned an excessively rigorous life that to him was nothing more than the attitude of a character not yet tamed by spiritual discipline. He reminded us that even the frailest people are children of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and our brothers. Before God, they are often not guilty of faults that we want to punish so severely. Most of the time, their faults are caused by abandonment. Therefore they are worthy of our kindness and patience.

Father Luigi belongs to the modern school of pedagogy whose main authority is Fr. Bosco. It would be praiseworthy if someone took up the study of his remarkable quality as an educator.

We should take inspiration and craft the norms for our own sound pedagogy from the theological-psychological elements we know and have already mentioned. We should put them into practice and help people to do the same, keeping in mind that we should also avoid personal and arbitrary interpretations and applications. It is what we call the “**preventive method**,” a method that is firmly built on the rich spirituality of the Founder.

Did Father Luigi Guanella possess his own spirituality? Can we study it?

In the last few years different spiritualities were studied. The best known are the Benedictine, Franciscan, Ignatian, Carmelite, Salesian, Vincentian, and Alphonsian (the last is the most popular, as ours should be). There were dignitaries and influential writers who had either promised us their active support in studying our Guanellian spirituality from the documents in our possession, or invited us to write down something ourselves. The project and their suggestion gratified us, though knowing very well it is not an easy task.

Father Guanella was an elected soul, called to the highest peaks of holiness. He became a wise and good spiritual director of souls in their journey to perfection. Committed to working on his own sanctification and the sanctification of others, he possessed an ideal, a commitment, a way and a method that were all his own. Can we figure out and define the original, personal elements of his spirituality?

The elaboration of this attractive subject needs both a convenient ascetic-doctrinal-historical culture and a diligent study of the personal life, apostolic ministry, and writings of Father Guanella.

I would like to suggest here some incomplete references, unfortunately jotted down in haste. (Charitas numbers 20-27-30-47-49-52-56-65-69-76-77-78-79-80)

Since he was a little boy, Father Luigi, inspired by the example of the piety and charity of his family, showed a natural instinct to retain his innocence and purity of heart and body.

In solitary and contemplative prayer his soul was inclined and attracted to divine love, preparing him to dispense his charitable and apostolic ardors on the poor, still in his dreams at the time.

The Lord, himself, guided the boy through premonitions opening to a future filled with charity and zeal:

- the vision of the poor old man outside the parish church in Campodolcino;
- the forewarning of the needy crowds by the Virgin Mary in Gualdera;
- the soup of dirt and water prepared with his sister Catherine;
- the repeating, at home and elsewhere, of homilies heard in church.

From early in life, his cherished dream was to become **a priest**. And for the priesthood he prepared himself by living a very intense Christian life. Proof could be his characteristic solicitude towards his classmates, towards the little friends of Gallio Academy, towards those in the seminary, and the needy in his own village. Sacrifice too was part of his preparation. It should be enough to mention the suffering of his homesickness, the strict discipline in the seminary, the cold harsh winters he endured, his constant tonsillitis, and his permanent headache. He prepared himself by constant study, even during summer vacations or when taking care of sick people.

Perhaps, during his youthful days, he did not fully visualize the distinctive signs of his future priesthood. However, his ardent charity did nothing to restrict his priestly ideal to stay within the boundaries of the small village church. For that purpose, he spent time acquiring knowledge of many other things that, later on, would be useful in helping his people. I refer to botanical research, nursing skills, catechism classes, agricultural and social issues.

After the ecstasy of his First Mass, during the long period of research in which he had to face many trials in order to carry out his personal vocation, he dedicated time and energy to a variety of pastoral activities: frequent preaching, writing of the little books that he was giving away, spiritual direction, vocation promotion, youth centers and evening schools...

The three years he spent in Turin at the side of Fr. Bosco were decisive for his future.

But the secret that sustained and nourished his soul during the waiting period was his deep spirit of prayer, mortification and obedience.

The fruits of that intense interior life were his perseverance in working and in seeking God's will, in seeking out answers for the needs of his neighbor and in keeping his exuberant and impetuous temper under control, except when God's honor was at stake through blasphemy, scandals or sectarian persecution against Church and Pope.

Some characteristics stand out in his spirituality:

- a humility and simplicity that abhor exterior appearances, that hide penances and fasting, that make him gentle and attentive to those he met or conversed with;
- a piety with no ostentation.

We know how much Father Luigi loved to converse with the Saints in Paradise and preach about them when he had an occasion. His sermons and writings were rich with stories, like his summary of the history of the Church for uneducated people, "From Adam to Pius IX" or "The Glories of the Papacy," in which he portrayed struggles and triumphs of the Church. His presentations about the Saints he particularly loved (St. Francis of Assisi), or were venerated in his diocese or region (St. Abbondius, St. Agrippinus, and St. Rocco, Bl. Andrew of Peschiera, St. Charles Borromeo, and St. Jerome Emiliani), were engaging.

By talking and writing about them, he tried to publicize their good service and kind personalities. At times he did not even call them "saint" not because he wanted to diminish their great virtues or deny the prestige of their liturgical veneration, but to show how close they are to us, how friendly they are to us, like members of our family. He talked about them for our imitation, as examples of Christian virtue, virtue common among local people of faith. He called them "flowers of Christian virtue." Among them he listed his sister Catherine, Sr. Anna Succetti from Savogno, the patient old man, Raymond Masanti from Pianello, the child Alessandrino Mazzucchi from Pianello, many Sisters of St. Mary of Providence (Sr. Clare Bosatta, Sr. Erminia Bosatta, Sr. Magdalene Granzella and others).

In the book, "*the Mountaineer*" (1886), with words of faith and tenderness, he addresses his people and encourages them to remember their ancestors in their faith and temporal well-being, and to keep their faith alive. "Hail, you are the son of saints; rejoice! Look at the venerated figures of your fathers, the apostolic personages who have regenerated you to the life of paradise and rejoice like the son at the knees of his loving fa-

ther. Good mountaineer, I embrace you with my whole soul. I am more fond of you than of anyone else. Of this I am aware. The summit of your mountain is sublime because from there you are better able to contemplate paradise. The depth of your valley is sacred because in the retirement of solitude one learns to love the Lord better and to love our brothers better” (L. GUANELLA, *Il Montanaro*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, pp. 987-988; Eng. Ed. *The Mountaineer*, vol. 4, page 4).

In his friendly way, he approached souls away from the Lord, drawing them to welcome Him back into their hearts, to lead the life of God’s children in his grace, and to reconcile themselves to Him.

In his gentle and vigorous way, he directed many souls, called by God to the perfection of his divine love, not to fear proposing the spiritual wisdom of St. Theresa of Avila or the seraphic ascents of St. Francis of Assisi. He incited them to climb higher and higher and then to spend their lives in works of charity. He led them to the highest levels of holiness, and, after their death, he was the one who proposed them as examples to be imitated.

All this zeal in bringing souls to God’s service and love (a zeal that enlivened his spiritual activity and transmitted it by words and deeds) was later passed on to the religious Congregations he founded.

Apparently, he considered religious Congregations an oasis of charity, “gardens in which the flowers of Christian holiness can be fostered and grow more easily” (L. GUANELLA, *R int. FsC 1899*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 976); places of prayer and fraternity in which, away from the world, the religious can dedicate themselves to saving the world in a closer imitation of the Lord Jesus.

Father Guanella left a deeper and greater mark among the Sisters because they are by nature more inclined to piety and charity and because, as his first institution, he had more opportunities and more time to cultivate them. The result is that many Sisters, though now deceased, are vividly remembered for their well-grounded, humble, active and ardent holiness. How many of them competed with each other in offering their lives generously to the Lord and to the poor! To them he addressed his inimitable conferences and writings, like “The Foundation” and the many Regulations in which he reversed his heart and spirituality.

To the Servants of Charity, too, he never tired of transmitting his spirit and pointing out goals of higher spirituality, as he did for the young Alessandrino Mazzucchi and the meritorious Bro. Pietro Osmetti. The first name that he gave to his priests and brothers was “Sons of the Sacred

Heart,” an explicit invitation to draw from the love of the Divine Heart and its inexhaustible riches. We may say that his last Regulations, given to us as a precious gift in 1910, are a compendium of the idea he had of the Servant of Charity. He always proposed the highest point of perfection, strongly stressing the need to hold on to the non-negotiable substance of the interior life with an exemplary observance of the Rule – sought most of the time through sacrifice and hard-work. Yet, he never dismissed the fact that among his religious there were lesser and greater intellectual and spiritual abilities.

The 1910 Regulations are written in a very plain and simple way with consideration for the level and degree to which each confrere finds himself in his spiritual journey. They disclose a path of high spirituality on which his religious should walk. In them he insists not only on the necessity of his religious giving priority to the interior life before exterior activity, but also on the care and commitment with which they must progress daily in the observance of the vows. He proposes the vows, in a practical way, as a walk of four consecutive steps: 1) poverty united to a great trust in Divine Providence; 2) the particular excellence of chastity - that should be preserved immaculate from Baptism (as his own) or firmly conquered after past fallings; 3) the high value of obedience that finds its positive justification in the filial love of God and in voluntary generosity of heart; 4) the necessary importance of different practices of mortification.

If a religious wants to flourish and find the necessary means to progress in his spiritual life and apostolate, Father Guanella says, he must immerse himself in an atmosphere of piety in which his soul can breathe. He uses beautiful and plain-spoken expressions when presenting to his confreres the confident prayer of the heart and holy meditation, more on the side of love than speculation, and devotion to the Eucharist.

In his excellent book *“Let us go to the Father,”* (1880) a plain commentary on the Our Father for the souls entrusted to him in Traona, and in his commentary on the Beatitudes, *“Let us go to the Mountain of Happiness,”* (1881) our sweet Father wrote the following tender similitude, that we have heard from him over and over when preaching or writing to us.

“You come to find the heavenly Father again. Come, come! How beautiful are your steps! How much your Father will rejoice once you are back with him! Hasten to him, and in doing so cry like the baby of the swallow in order to be heard. Moan like a wailing dove, so that your father may come to meet you. The off-spring of the swallow cries and that

of the dove does it even more, because they know that wailing and crying are the only means to get the attention of their mother. A little child does the same. You remember when you were little and called, 'Daddy! Daddy!' Your father would come to you in haste to fondle you and fill your little hands with gifts. Think this way now: if the mother of the little swallow or dove anxiously flies to her little ones, and if a father lovingly worries about his little child, how much more concerned will your heavenly Father be about you? Try to cry as the chick of the swallow, or to moan or meditate as the dove, and you will see" (L. GUANELLA, *Andiamo al Padre*, Opera Omnia, Vol. III, p. 108; Eng. Ed. *Let us go to the Father*, vol. 3, page 8).

Meditation is a daily commitment, a duty and a grace if we want to live a good life and be united to the Lord. Father Luigi warned: "He who neglects meditation out of laziness should fear for his own vocation and for the help of divine grace." Religious should choose "one of the holy truths as a subject and then implore the Lord to understand it fully." He added, "They must immerse themselves in the truth they want to penetrate and dwell in it like fish in the water. Then they must look at themselves as in a mirror, and with divine aid become enlightened, warmed and restored like the beggar to the warmth of a beautiful spring sun..." (L. GUANELLA, *R int. FsC 1899*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, pp. 1008-1009; Eng. Ed, vol. 1, page 173-174).

The day begins, at dawn, at the altar of Holy Mass for a "holy celebration" or with a Holy Communion, like "the industrious bee who is busy in the petals of the flower sipping in the sweet nectar and converting it into the exquisite honey of piety and devotion." The day ends at the altar of the holy Tabernacle in the evening Eucharistic Benediction, because "Christian parents have the pious custom of blessing their children... every evening before going to sleep. So may our heavenly Father bless our children and let it be a pledge of that blessing that Jesus Christ will give his elect on the last day" (L. GUANELLA, *R. SdC 1910*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 1296; Eng. Ed. vol. 2, page 69).

Our spirituality, as practiced and suggested by Father Luigi, our Founder and Father, also requests:

- 1) To be inspired by a sincere sense of filial abandonment and unshakable trust in the heavenly Father, smiling so lovingly from the beautiful nature all around us, so exuberant in mercy and goodness in the numberless gifts of grace gushing forth from the Heart of Jesus, our patron and model, and through the mediation of the sweet love of our heavenly Mother;

- 2) To adhere, in docile obedience, both to all truths and graces of our Catholic Faith guarded and given to us as a gift by our holy mother Church, and to the august Pontiff of Rome, infallible Teacher and unfailing Shepherd;
- 3) To secure for ourselves the necessary food of daily Eucharist;
- 4) To consider the irresistible goodness of God, the source of our trusting piety and our ability to comfort the afflicted and to assist the needy;
- 5) To remove from our practices of piety, fervent and devout as they may be, and from our attitudes towards our neighbor, everything that shows singularity and exteriority that is not requested by duty and Rule;
- 6) In exercising our activities in education, social assistance, and ministry, the Servants must see to it that charity is the origin of unity among them and a way to elevate their hearts and minds to God. This is the supreme mandate left us by our Lord, because all of us are children of God and brothers of Jesus, our Savior. We have the opportunity to perform, in a small way, the immense benefit of Jesus' love towards us by showering our love on those entrusted to us, on those who are suffering and in need of material and spiritual help and on our brothers in the Priesthood (*and Religious Life*). Father Guanella said that certain graces he had received were coming from them, his brother priests.

By the example and suggestion of the Founder, "Prayer and Suffering" must be the program that guides each Christian life, each religious life, and the lives of each one of us.

A suffering that should make us more like blessed Jesus and transform the inevitable and mandatory sufferings of our human condition into the means, which is at our disposal, to progress in our spiritual life, into the treasure of our merits, and the capital of our glory. Among the sufferings let us list community life, mandatory vigilance and custody of heart and senses, execution of our duty, carrying out all possible good, observance of divine and Church laws of abstinence and temperance and observance of the law proper to religious life.

A prayer that should guarantee light to the mind and energy to the will in our duty to walk, one step at the time, on God's paths, making our conversation with the heavenly Father familiar while still here on earth.

O sweet and dear Father Luigi Guanella, our father, you have given us the divine Heart; you have consecrated us as children of grace and love to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; you have given us Mary as Mother of Divine Providence and Queen of Peace, help us always to fill our heart with divine love and to make it more precious by poverty, chastity, and holy obedience so that our brothers and sisters may rejoice, souls may be edified, and all of us may be happy, and all may be saved in the Kingdom of Blessed Jesus! Amen.

THE MIND *

A revised chronology (see Charitas n. 103) completes this number

Fr. Mazzucchi writes:

I have to acknowledge that I received from the Lord the singular grace to live, since my birth, more or less at the side of Father Luigi Guanella, through his unforgettable relationship with me personally and with my family. I have enjoyed his fatherly friendship, his guidance, his advice and confidence. He even entrusted me with important tasks. I had the opportunity to be close to him in his last illness, in his painful agony, and in the blessed death of our dear Father Luigi, our father.

Having entrusted to me the editorial office of "*La Divina Provvidenza*" magazine, I had the opportunity to write down almost hour by hour what happened in those days, and to start the process of recognizing the heroism of his virtues.

As we know, we did not waste any time in opening the canonical process. However, in 1942 the apostolic process came to an end because of the difficulties encountered in the examination of testimony, due to the explainable inexperience of Tribunal officials. If other vexing events, unconnected to the shining virtues of the Servant of God, did not further delay the process, the recognition of Venerability might have happened on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth and maybe his Beatification in that same year.

* Charitas n. 100, pp. 4-6.

Now, our only hope is that the Sacred Congregation of Rites will resume the acts so that we can reach Venerability and, after that, the recognition of the miracles and Beatification in a few years.

In the meantime, it is fundamental that each confrere should be committed to making known, as much as possible, the history and mind of the Founder and above all to be faithful in following his spirit.

As an inheritance he left us his mind and heart and the testimony of his faith in several books that, in spite of their hagiographic-catechetical-historical-ascetic character, reveal his spiritual and moral beliefs. Lately, we have republished them in pocket-sized books that should be improved some day. They are easy to read, yet effective. Some pages, highly instructive and deeply penetrating, give us the opportunity to admire the mind and heart of a saint. He, himself, exhorted us in word and in print to read them as spiritual reading, especially "*The Foundation*." In fact, he entrusted to me the task of publishing a new edition to be distributed among the Servants of Charity.

A few years before his death, the Founder dictated his personal memoirs which were collected into two manuscripts, reviewed by him. His exclusive intention was to give glory to "The Ways of Providence" towards our Institute while giving us a means to faithfully follow in his steps.

He published a monthly magazine, "La Divina Provvidenza," that he personally edited for a few years before passing the baton to an excellent collaborator, Mrs. Maddalena Albini Crosta. In the magazine we breathe in his longing to do some good for others, making known and spreading the work of charity of his Houses. Later on, Father Bacciarini was editor for two years, and when he became Bishop the magazine was entrusted to me. Our task was to continue collecting the memories of those who were close to him in Italy and in his journey to North America.

His *Letters*, too, are many. Hopefully, someone in the future will publish them with fitting notes regarding people and the places they mention.

Last but not least, we should mention the various and precious *Regulations*.

For the benefit of our mind and heart, may nothing be wasted of the treasure of the doctrine, direction, suggestions and examples of our holy and sweet Father and Teacher!

The great figure of Father Luigi can offer a lot of material for further study of his virtues and spirit. We hope that, through the spreading of his Institute and of his ideas, more people may love and imitate him.

Standing before his tomb, the desire for his glorification may grow. We may obtain it by our holiness of life and by working hard to spread our charitable institutions.

Let us renew the solemn commitment:

- to know and imitate his virtues, personally and in our communities;
- to observe diligently and exactly all the holy Rules, those regarding piety and charity, shining example of life, purity of life, personal and community poverty; and those regarding the good management of our Houses (the resolutions of the House Councils, distribution of minutes, requests, reports, certificates, local and general financial reports, all rules that favor a well organized Institute, in the spirit of edifying obedience).

The Lord will bless us from on high. He will bestow his joy within our hearts. He will send us good and holy vocations for the priesthood and brotherhood. He will give us the esteem of authorities, cooperators and the faithful through our humble, active life as Servants of Charity, worthy sons of Father Guanella.

We will obtain all these graces if, by the example of the Father, we treasure, as source and soul of our life, a profound devotion to the Holy Eucharist that we will abundantly dispense together with the material bread, a Eucharist that we will celebrate and adore with great fervor in the holy Tabernacle.

SYNTHESIS OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF FATHER GUANELLA

Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi

Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi, in some issues of Charitas (n. 19, pp. 13-14; n. 36, pp. 7-9; n. 86, pp. 28-30) mentions a list of characteristics of Fr. Guanella's spirituality that constitute the spiritual patrimony of the Congregation.

He addresses the confreres, with warm and direct language, so that they may live them with the same passion as the Founder.

We have collected them by forming one text. We have drawn them from the original texts, not quite literally, but with some adaptations in order not to be repetitive.

We have kept the exhortative trait which Fr. Leonardo used with his confreres, even when he did not use it, in order to unify the text.

“We will easily reach the general and special purpose of the Congregation if we, in remembering his insistent exhortations and shining life, keep alive in our minds and in our daily practice – by example first rather than by words – the directives that Father Luigi, our father, left us as a spiritual inheritance.”

“We are aware that an Institute that forgets its purpose and abandons its spirit is going to die.”

“Because you know and often repeat, when talking or writing about the Founder, the mantra *Prayer and Suffering*, do not forget that you must keep it alive in your heart and mind, because he did fully live it. He did leave it to his disciples, while he was dying, as an unforgettable memory. You have to practice it daily if you want to follow in his blessed footsteps, until you may reach heaven, as an exemplary Religious and worthy Servant of Charity.”

I. Walk in the presence of the Lord, looking at Him with filial love

1. Take care to be and to walk in the presence of the Lord, looking to him with the love of a son. Commit yourself to walk and to do everything under His benevolent eye. Listen and keep in your heart His words of advice and admonition. Call Him frequently through ardent prayer.

If you look at the Lord, if you listen to Him, if you talk to Him, it will come much easier to you to pray, “Father! Father!”

Like a fish darting in the water, like a bird freely flying in the sky, so should you, too, enjoy and profit by living in intimate union with your Lord, who lives with you, in you, and for you.

By seeing God in this way and by imploring Him, so provident and good like no other father on earth, you will find peace and confidence in facing all the events of your life and day because He can and wants to arrange everything for the benefit of the son who wants to please him. Be assured of that!

II. With great trust in Providence

1. Always show a firm and confident trust in God’s assistance; a trust not disconnected, however, from your duty to make use, though avoiding excessive publicity, of all personal resources and cooperation with benefactors. Father Luigi used to say that we can do great good, even for the rich, when asking them to help the poor!

We collaborate with Providence, even by maintaining a good administration of the House, following the spirit of poverty. Trust in Providence should be combined with the constant work and sacrifice called for by the exercise of charity. The Founder said that to do good we need to climb Calvary.

Father Luigi left us a treasure of financial-moral norms, spread here and there in his many writings, which, someday, should be convenient to collect into a booklet.

We deserve the assistance of Providence:

- by praying the Chaplet to Divine Providence, a prayer that we should treasure and practice as part of our Guanellian spirituality;
- by administering properly the patrimony of the poor;

- by beginning, without fear, a work of charity that appears necessary, even when disposing of small financial means;
- by giving preference to the most abandoned when accepting residents;
- by keeping a certain number of true poor in the House, who are supported by the funds of the Providence of the heavenly Father, even in those Houses where we may assist, out of spiritual charity, patients who are giving their financial contribution;
- by not establishing fixed revenues;
- by not getting discouraged when facing grave moral or financial difficulties; we should always be well disposed to facing the real martyrdom of poverty and charity;
- by keeping away sin, that separates the House from the Lord, and distrust in divine help.

2. Get used to contemplating the beauty and providence of God in the wonders of creation or in scientific discoveries. You will rise to God by reading his name, written in fiery letters in the book of nature.

Sing the canticle of Providence in your life. Never mistrust her, but love her as your dear Mother. By living in much poverty, because of giving to the needy, we will never lack the bread that comes from the hands of the provident Lord.

III. Nourish your piety through fervent prayer: “Prayer”

Favor your intimate union with God and nourish your piety by:

- Meditation;
- Spiritual reading
- Weekly confession
- Annual Retreat;
- Daily recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Offer to your Lord – the good heavenly Father – the first greeting at the beginning of a new day and the last one at the end of the day through morning and evening prayers... To the Blessed Mother of Divine Providence, sweet and holy Mother, show your filial devotion... Commend your soul and the souls of the dying to St. Joseph...

Delight in the beauty and sweetness of the Heart of God should be your joy, so that you may be generous and resolved to guard the purity of mind, heart, eye and body.

Take time to consider the holiness and generosity of God and you will acquire, little by little, the necessary humility of heart and mind, whose inviting model is and must be the divine Heart... You will see the necessity and the duty to easily recognize your faults and your wrongdoing; more easily you will be disposed to do God's will and to walk on the trustworthy highway of obedience.

May the Holy Eucharist be the center of your worship, the soul of your piety, and the source of your charity. Make sure that the souls may be imbued with that, because Holy Eucharist is the sun of the earth, the life of the world, the true Paradise on earth for all who firmly believe.

May your piety have the deeply Eucharistic characteristic that the Founder held. Like a man always spiritually hungry, he made an effort to attend as many Masses as possible. He desired that the celebrant should get ready for the celebration of Holy Mass with an accurate preparation and, after Mass, spend time in thanksgiving done in the presence of the faithful. He desired that his priests should pray the Liturgy of the Hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament. We should also practice frequent and rapid visits to the Blessed Sacrament, our Paradise on earth and Master of the House.

The Eucharistic Bread should be widely distributed to all, young and old.

At the end of the day, like the good parent blessing his children before going to sleep, the Lord Himself, through the evening Eucharistic Benediction, will bless you while you ask for his forgiveness and offer Him your work and suffering. In the evening of your earthly life, Mother Church, through her prayers and the grace of her Sacraments, will approach you and will accept and bless the ultimate immolation of your earthly existence and she will entrust you to Mary the Blessed. As a dear and sweet Mother, Mary will accompany you to receive, from the merciful Father in heaven, the eternal blessing and reward.

IV. Strengthen your spiritual lives with sacrifice: "Suffering"

You know that the exercise of prayer and union with God is a sacrifice of praise and requests the sacrifice of your will and senses. Transform

each action into an offering of mind and will to the Lord. Transform each of your sufferings into a prayer, well accepted by the Lord. Recall what the Founder believed: that prayer is omnipotent when combined with mortification; that we need prayer and suffering to mature good works; that the foundation of our Houses is built on four “F”: *fame, fumo, freddo e fastidi*, that is, the suffering caused by hunger (*fame*), by smoke in the eyes (*fumo*) from wood-stoves, by cold (*freddo*), and by tribulation (*fastidi*).

Because suffering is inevitable here on earth, you should follow the words of the Gospel (perhaps forgotten) regarding suffering, and acquire from them a great help for the spirit, recalling what the holy Founder said: we cannot do any good if we refuse to endure the hard walk to Calvary.

On the altar of Eucharistic Sacrifice, that you offer every day in union with the eternal Priest, consecrate another Host, you yourself gladly offering your physical pain, your voluntary mortification, illness, and ailments of your failing body, the sadness of your spirit, family losses, disappointments...

V. With a heart, ardent with charity towards your neighbor

May your heart burn; a heart inflamed by the fire of charity and by the desire to do good. Be hungry and thirsty with zeal for the glory of God. As a minister of charity and piety, spread a good example in the House in what you watch, in what you say, in how you behave.

In doing so, you will transform into prayer your care and ministry of charity towards the poor, the children, and the sorrowful crowd of elderly and handicapped in mind and body.

Widen your heart in welcoming to the most abandoned miseries and the dregs of society. Woe to those who stray from the spirit of the Congregation! Make sure that those residents who can contribute financially to the House, do so. It is right that, in deference to the good people (*benefactors*) who support and help those who receive the services of the House “*gratis et amore Dei*” (without charge), those who have means, should support themselves.

Our sweet Father may be an example to us. Since his youth, he manifested a strong desire to help children and those who were sick. It was an anticipation of his tireless priesthood, of his being a bold and active savior of souls, of his being the enemy of doing nothing or keeping the status quo, of

his looking into new forms of a larger apostolate: preaching, associations, and printed material. He was so caught up in finding ways to do good for all souls that each step he took, each word he pronounced, was like seeds of good that brought fruit even in those who were away from the Church.

VI. With the zeal of a fervent and tireless apostle

If you see in each brother a son of God, a son that God himself holds dear in his heart, a son that Jesus Christ won back with his Blood, a son that was given to you as a companion on earth in walking toward the heavenly dwelling, you will desire salvation of soul and true good on earth for him; you will become his excellent spiritual and corporal provider; you will try to be benevolent toward him, indulgent, kind, and charitable when giving him beneficial advice.

In the souls entrusted to you, especially the young, instill and cultivate piety.

Wage war against any offense to God. Regarding sinners, atone for their sins. If you want to heal their wounds with delicate and loving charity, always see in them the ill-treated and disfigured face of our divine Redeemer.

VII. With a broad-minded spirit, united to an attitude of benevolence and mercy (educational system) and tireless hard work

Always be well-disposed and merciful toward your neighbor:

- When directing souls in spiritual direction, be careful to know the boundaries of what the Church declares licit and beneficial to the souls. Offer frequent and understandable preaching, and give frequent opportunities to receive Holy Communion;
- When taking disciplinary action, be vigilant and strong in preventing and repressing the scandal of blasphemous language that corrupts souls and society, and in stopping the contagious immorality of loose morals.

Your neighbor should feel welcomed by your loving *benevolence* that comes from an attitude of personal humility, a benevolence that is an expression of love toward the humble. It is the right way to gain the confi-

dence of people when helping them to recover and cherish a virtuous life and bringing them close to God.

Regarding discipline, always remember to use the wise and effective *preventive method*:

- that requests a patient and constant vigilance toward our residents, and the self-control of our temper that should always avoid harshness, dangerous partiality and improper attachment;
- that takes its nourishment from supernatural charity and lively piety, abundant and understandable religious instruction, and frequent Holy Communion;
- that guarantees to your ministry unexpected success. “The penitence of getting to bed tired as though we were beaten.”

Have a spirit and zeal for tireless *hard work*, as the Founder so insistently recommended:

- in all your activities and in assisting people entrusted to you, everything should be sanctified by charity;
- by seriously applying to study, on the example of Father Luigi, who, since his youth, turned his vast culture toward those Church and ascetic issues that were useful to his ministry;
- by being willing to form your heart and mind to the principles of religious life through valid literature.

Imitate the characteristic *simplicity* of Father Luigi which he accompanied with the practice of every admirable virtue. As he has done, avoid any pretence, bragging or affected ways. He was so reserved that people who were not familiar with him easily got the idea that he was a priest of great heart, but of modest culture and experience.

Love silence and foster solitude of heart. Walk among people doing good by good example: by sobriety and modesty, by doing works of charity, all the time with your heart turned to God. Let the Holy Spirit guide you, that you may promptly obey his heavenly inspiration. Keep the door closed to your heart to keep the warmth inside that is necessary to bake the daily bread.

“Dear and sweet Father of our souls, welcome and help our daily resolution to make this spirit our own, so that you may gladly see in us your own features. Bless us in this life, and reunite us with you in eternal bliss!”

THE PURPOSE OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SdC

Fr. Piero Pellegrini and Fr. Attilio Beria

Fr. PIERO PELLEGRINI

The life of Father Guanella presents an intense dynamism of works, numberless interests and desires.

It begins from a rich variety of charitable fields:

- children - sick - missions (when still a seminarian);
- youth - schools - handicapped (buoni figli) - vocations - printed matter - apostolate;
- a spontaneous offering to go to the aid of people affected by the cholera epidemic.

It passes through stages in:

- Como;
- Milan
- Rome, when finally the Congregation took root.

It reaches the highest levels through:

- the suggestion to assume a forth vow for the care of those infected by contagious diseases (1897);
- the extraordinary interventions he put into action at the time of the earthquakes in Southern Italy (Reggio Calabria and Messina, 1908) and Central Italy (Marsica, 1915);
- an interest in Italian immigrants (Switzerland, United States of America);
- the Pious Union of St. Joseph for the dying.

* N. 5, Dicembre 1974, di *Informazioni*.

This range, which covers all fields of need, has gained him the original nickname of “Garibaldi of charity,” an intrepid man who, out of love, wanders through the world looking for poverties to relieve.

For an adequate view of Father Guanella we should avoid taking the easy way of tailoring his intense interior and exterior life to fit a predetermined mould, because we might limit and impoverish it, narrowing the infinite horizons of his charity.

First of all we have to grasp the soul of Father Guanella who never accepted barriers or limits. With constancy, he waited and prepared for his appointed time. Secondly, we must examine the different solicitations that inspired him to carry out and even to limit his boundless ideal that was never totally satisfied: “we can never stop as long as there are poor to be assisted and distress to be relieved.”

Finally, we should try to summarize in a few words the result of that examination and make it part of the Constitutions, the program of our religious life. The Constitutions should be a dense yet stimulating program that should hearten those confreres who are still weak, while galvanizing those more generous spirits that God might send to the Congregation, those who are willing to follow the Founder as he truly is.

It is not a matter of terminology or formal rules. We are dealing here with the life of the Founder, a life that should be approached respectfully and accurately. We should also add the life-experience of his first confreres, who should inspire all Servants in their courageous resolutions and projects. This kind of work would ask for a critical study that only experts can carry out.

In the meantime, using the writings we are in possession of, we should go through all the interior and exterior data that could be helpful to reach a temporary, yet sufficiently documented, solution.

The data could be gathered into three tracks:

- *the life of Father Guanella*, by reviewing his “curriculum,” his accomplishments that are not a mere arid succession of dates connected to desires and fantasies, to foundations sometimes disorganized and the fruit of instinct and to controversies. We should give care to his heart and mind that gushes forth from his writings or from his impulsive and unpredictable decisions;
- his reflections: texts, *documents*, especially the Regulations that he wrote one after another. They seem to stop halfway between an accomplished fact and a not yet realized desire;
- the impressions, the *opinions* of those close to him.

It seems inevitable that Founders too have to slowly, slowly accept the exigencies and suggestions that come from practical situations and cause them to limit their choices to a few definite ones which are restricted in their purpose. His successors, on the other hand, run the risk of fossilizing the first forms passed on to them and identifying them as the only spirit of the Institute.

In Father Guanella, adaptation was never a passive holding on to the choices made once and for all; it was a critical assessment of the requests for help and his offer, always open to assisting in some emergencies in those grave cases not previously foreseen. He did that with a freshness and youthful enthusiasm, which astounds us in a man over seventy, when he personally went to offer his help after an earthquake in Central Italy or when he traveled to the United States.

I. The life of Father Guanella

a) *Survey of ideals, dreams, desires, accomplishments...*

It is of course an incomplete survey, yet sufficiently representative of the rich exuberance of the spirit of Father Guanella.

We will refer to facts, dates and places, and, when necessary, the planned activities (desired or carried out) within their different fields.

- **1863** - *Seminary*: missions, children and sick people (during summer vacations).
- **1867** - *Savogno*: schools, handicapped (*buoni figli*).
- **1868** - *Vocations*: in Campodolcino...
- **1872** - ascetic writings for countryside people.
- **1875** - with don Bosco: youth centers (*oratorio*), seminaries for adult vocations (*scuola di fuoco*) - missions...
- **1878** - *Traona*: boarding school (*collegio*), “center for youth care” (*istituzione per la cura della gioventù*) and vocations.
- **1882** - *Pianello*: “elements and spirit of Cottolengo:” orphaned girls, schools, workrooms for spooling; day care for children, charitable institution for male and female invalids, elderly and poor; home health care; but also for blind, mute, deaf, mentally deficient, paralytic people.
- **1883/84** - earthquake at Ischia Island - cholera in Naples (he offered his help).
- **1885** - *Ardenno*: school and catechism.

- **1885** - flood provoked by the river Tartano.
- **1886 and ff** - *Como*: orphans, elderly, invalids, deaf, mentally disabled, epileptic, blind, mute, crippled and all those wretched in a situation of being treated as human waste, “The Arc of Noah!” home health care, young ladies lodged at the House while giving their services in private homes.
- 1890**: elderly, infirm, blind, mute and deaf, poor students, children in vocational schools, elderly and disabled women, mute and death women, chronically ill women, servants in private homes, female students.
The mute and deaf, and the mentally ill occupy a temporary structure until an appropriate one is built. In the House there are 15 groups of people in need of care; and... “We can never stop as long as there are poor to be assisted and distresses to be relieved.”
- Criteria to be admitted to Divine Providence House: “We ask only if they are in a situation of suffering” (*La Div. Provv.* 1915, p. 206).
- **1890** - *Milan*: day care for children at Blessed Trinity Parish.
- **1891** – a church for the public: ministry of souls.
- **1893** - *Milan*: day care for children in P. Castaldi Street.
- **1894** - *Milan*: day care for children at Porta Vittoria.
- **1894** - *Milan*: St. Ambrose ad Nemus...
- **1894** – “his desire to be a missionary and to help some missionary Bishops, who were visiting the House in Como, awoke once again.”
- **1898** - *Milan*: St. Michael youth center offering afterschool activities and remedial classes.
- **1903** - *Milano*: St. Cajetan institution for orphans.
- **1903** - *Trenno*: farm for mentally handicapped - elderly.
- **1896** - *Belgioioso*: women of all ages and conditions.
- **1897** - *Lora S. Maria*: Motherhouse of the Sisters DSMP: female population of elderly, mentally handicapped and orphans.
- **1897** – suggestion to take a forth religious vow for the care of contagious sick people.
- **1898** - *Splügen*, and later on *Andeer (Switzerland)*: Catholic presence and ministry for Italian immigrants.
- **1898** - *Roveredo (Switzerland)*: institution for chronically ill ladies, boarding school for boys, farm for mentally disabled.
- **1899** - *Capolago*: day care for children, oratorio for girls, nursing home, later in *Castel S. Pietro* and *Maggia*.
- **1900** - *Promontogno (Switzerland)*: Catholic mission among Protestants, later in *Vicosoprano (1901)*.

- **1900** - *Fratta*: priests in need of care, male and female elderly, orphaned girls, mentally disabled, male and female oratorio, day care for children, vocational school.
- **1900** - *Villanova del Ghebbo*: day care for children and parish activities.
- **1900** - *S. Cassiano del Meschio*: elderly, day care for children, vocational school, oratorio for girls.
- **1900** - *Menaggio*: mentally disabled for well-to-do families.
- **1900** - *Stimianico*: women in need from lower class conditions and impoverished women once well-to-do.
- **1900** - *Barzio*: day care for children, oratorio, elderly, orphans, mentally disabled.
- **1900** - *Nuova Olonio*: mentally disabled: farm.
- **1900** - *Ardenno*: mentally disabled.
- **1902** - *Palestine*: his desire: one of his Houses in the Middle East?
- **1903** - *Rome*: farm in Monte Mario.
- **1903** - *Rome*: Pius X nursing home: mentally disabled, orphaned girls, elderly women (**1904**).
- **1906** - *Carpignano e Livraga*: day care for children, nursing home for women.
- **1906** - *Saronno*: unmarried women: “though a new branch, it is a shoot from the same tree.”
- **1908** - *Rome*: St. Joseph Trionfale: parish.
- **1908** - *Gatteo*: vocational school for boys.
- **1908** - *Ferentino*: orphans and elderly.
- **1908** - Earthquake in Calabria (Southern Italy): “I offered room in the Houses in Rome, Milan, and Como for some orphans or elderly, survivors of the disaster that happened in Calabria.”
- **1909** - *Trecenta*: youth center, parish activities, sick and elderly.
- **1911** - *Berra*: day care for children, school for girls.
- **1912** - Decretum Laudis from the Holy See.
- **1912** - *United States of America*: Italian immigrants.
- **1913** - *Laureana di Borrello*: day care for children - variety of poverities.
- **1913** – *Rome*: Pious Union of St. Joseph for the dying.
- **1915** – Earthquake in Marsica (Central Italy): orphaned boys and girls, largely infants... “300 minors, and now we will enjoy taking care of many elderly that Divine Providence seems to send us.”

b) Some observations

In his “Arc of Noah” Houses, the use of precise criteria and determination of needs is often present, as opposed to pure chance or external pressure. “Little by little as the Work takes root, you will be able to house an orphan, a mentally retarded, an abandoned, an aged person, and you will have the consoling certainty that your House is sending out deep roots” (L. MAZZUCCHI, *La vita, lo spirito e le opere di don L. Guanella*, Ed. Nuove Frontiere, p. 162; Eng. Ed. *The Life, the Spirit and the Work of Fr. L. Guanella*, page 132).

His Houses were envisioned as citadels of charity, throbbing with life and people of different ages, with different and complementary groups of patients. Later on, the “Arc of Noah” Houses were reorganized around only one group of patients, while most of the other groups were suppressed. This step was perceived as too restrictive and mortified the original intention of the Founder. Thus, the necessity to open our Houses to the outside was born.

Often our Houses have to adapt and accept, for a limited time (at times for a long time), new and unexpected kinds of patients: deaf-mute, mentally ill, earthquake survivors. It seems that people perceive our Houses as “emergency rooms” or “waiting rooms,” where they spend time before finding a place in a hospital, where the infirm can wait indefinitely before finding the right solution for their situation.

At times, even Police Stations sent someone. Truly, the Lord under the disguise of a poor person arrived in our Houses at the most unexpected and inopportune hour of the day and night, and the “servant” was required to be ready all the time.

c) A reference

“The family of the House is a family of brothers who love and help each other. Each class of patients has its own ward... But that does not mean that they cannot spend time together: it is beneficial to the elderly to have children around, and for children to spend time with the elderly. The “buoni figli” will benefit from being in contact with normal people. The healthy, spending time with the sick, will learn to love and sympathize with them. However, it is not convenient that they spend too much time together, because after awhile they will get tired of each other. It is human fragility! So, visits should be short, like angelic apparitions” (L. GUANELLA, *Reg. FsC, 1899, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 1079*).

d) The principles of this practice could be found in the writings of the Founder

An article that Father Guanella wrote in the “*Divine Providence*” magazine in 1900 (April, pages 26-28), could be very characteristic: “Traits and scope of the ministries within the Divine Providence House.”

“The House of Divine Providence does not have a well defined program (*policies and procedures*), or better, it has its own. It consists, first, in making sure that a particular ministry should be taken into consideration and approved when it is truly necessary. Second, we must put all our efforts into beginning the new ministry and supporting it by God’s help with the cooperation of benefactors, trying our best to fight constantly against and defeat the inevitable difficulties. Is it not the constant plan of the enemy of goodness to oppose goodness to the last?

The ministries of the Pious House are works of mercy and, as such, they should be divided into the corporal and spiritual. Often, the good done to the body is also useful to the soul.

The House opens its door to those poor people who are rejected by other facilities, precisely because they are unable to find help anywhere else. Did Jesus not give his divine Blood for them also?

It is not convenient, however, that those who can support themselves be supported by others, it’s like stealing from those who are truly in need. It is convenient that they should give their financial support according to their potential, even looking for help from benefactors. He, who is in a position to support himself, must give his support according to his potential: if he has a little, he should give a little, as long as he is not totally supported by the House.

Here, we have to mention what we already know: the House of Divine Providence does not have any funds except the funds that Divine Providence offers from time to time. Ergo, the House cannot reject the contributions, regardless of how small, from its patients.

We should also mention here that many State or public institutions are spending big money for education and public assistance. Because these institutions are run by paid staff, the advantage to the poor is very limited, if not problematic.

If, on the other hand, these same institutions employed people who work only for God and charity, surely they could use their money more effectively, they could assist more people in need, and would not be in a position to waste money and resources.

Our House, it is useful to repeat it over and over, is not a hotel or a private school. It is a shelter for those poor who are unable to find a roof, anywhere, under which they can find refuge.

The House provides board and lodging, education and instruction according to the conditions of the residents. Moreover, the House is also more than happy to cooperate with State or public institutions, when properly requested.

Is it beneficial to provide luxury lodging to poor people who, after a while, will go back to their hovels? No!

The House provides what is necessary to take them out of poverty, but without shifting them from their status. Here in the House we provide what is nurtured by charity and faith in order to instill in them, even physically, a strength and vigor that is often a matter of envy among the well-to-do.

As a matter of fact, the House intends to open its arms as wide as possible in order to serve a larger number of the poor, and this would be impossible if we treated a small number of residents too richly and more abundantly.

Knowing that all good comes from God, our House implores, daily and several times a day, the that the Lord in his mercy may send daily bread. We pray to Providence, who is always generous towards those who put all their trust in her. She will never fail to give her help.

When the opportunity arises, we should not refuse to hold out our hands to the rich, without insisting and being indiscreet, knowing that the hearts of men are in God's hands. He is the one who has said, "It is better to give rather than receive. The one who gives to the poor lends to God. Blessed is the man who helps the poor and the needy; he will find comfort at the end of his life."

While resources allow, the House should provide immediately for urgent needs. We shudder with horror just thinking about the, unfortunately, many cases in which children are exposed to violence of soul and body. They demand not only Christian charity but a humanitarian spirit also to immediately remove and save them from such brutalization.

Oh, blessed is the man who, by prayer and assistance, comes to the aid of this work of mercy! In time of trial, divine consolations will come to comfort him! In order to do much good, who is the man that will not be glad to contribute his money, intelligence and heart?

After having invoked God's light, the House of Divine Providence extends its ministry where the need is most urgent and where human fore-

sight can see a chance of success” (La Divina Provvidenza, *Indole ed estensione delle Opere della Casa della Divina Provvidenza*, aprile 1900, pp. 26-28).

We should look into other instances if we want to discover the heart of Father Guanella in the face of unusual and unforeseen situations and to understand his mind and tactics. The last five years of his life could be the most telling:

- Discussions provoked by the Apostolic Visitation and the torment of his heart, torn between the desire for having his Institute approved (not before a thorough reorganization of its internal life) and the rejection of the recommendation to abandon some original purposes of the Institute;
- The idea of founding the Pious Union of St. Joseph, so Christian in its efforts and so full of faith;
- His journey to the United States of America and the yearning to do something right away;
- On the eve of his departure from this earth, he was still active in places where despair and suffering was at home (earthquake).

e) Reasons urging him to move toward answering new needs; what he had done; how he went through his hours of trial

We offer only a few quotes:

From Boston (U.S.A.), December 31, 1912: “It is because of our weakness and timidity that we did not come here at least ten years sooner. The desire was in us earlier than ten years ago, but I had to wait for the call from above” (*La Divina Provvidenza*, 1913, p. 17).

April 1913: “For the development of our Institutions... In carrying out our mission, we receive from the charity of Christ: the principles, the ways and the extent. The more a person is poor, wanting in means and lacking in human care, the more he will be preferred, welcomed and helped by the House. We would prefer to welcome a child without both or one of his parents than a child who has both parents; an orphan child to a non orphan; a child that has no one and is abandoned by all; a child that has no protection and care at all, rather than a child that enjoys favors and recommendations” (*Ibidem*, p. 49).

Rome, January 18, 1915: "I reached Avezzano with Fr. Bacciarini to check the enormity of the disaster (earthquake) that razed towns and villages to the ground like a sickle cutting grass. What a ruin! What desolation! Our souls are in grief. For the moment, I brought with me to St. Pancrazio (*Pacras*) in Rome half a dozen people totally abandoned. We will see what we can do in the days to come... In the meantime a committee has been established in St. Joseph Trionfale Parish to organize the necessary help. I would have desired to go back to the disaster area if my health had been better."

Ferentino, January 18, 1915: "While Fr. Bacciarini roamed the Abruzzi area, I came to Ferentino where I found traces of the earthquake and the terrorized people who are camped outside their houses... Tomorrow I will be back in Rome to check on the progress made by the Committee."

January 28, 1915 - a Sister stationed at St. Pancrazio writes: "We have welcomed old ladies who are wounded and in shock, a 16 month old girl, another 22 months old, men who are deaf and blind... Father Luigi is here now, He just announced that he wants to open the doors of St. Pancrazio to fifty orphan boys and girls, most of them still babies. It seems that we are even going to put beds in the kitchen. I have no idea how we will be able to manage all that. God sees and will provide. Father Luigi arrived here soaked and coughing. We had warmed up his room. He could have stayed for a moment, but he did not. He said that he was going back there with Fr. Bacciarini and other priests to gather together other children and bring them here by car... Even Countess Stanger Parravicini, accompanied by the wife of the governor of Rome and other noble ladies, came from the disaster area bringing some victims with them to recover at the House. One of them was an old lady, blind and wounded, found under debris after so many days... We still have Jesus exposed on the altar. He will take care and help us in such moments... As long as we are able to stand on our feet, we will work day and night."

Rome, February 1, 1915: "We currently have more than 200 victims of the earthquake in our Houses: the little ones from two to six are under the care of the Sisters in St. Pancrazio. Tomorrow morning two Sisters will go to the earthquake area. The tireless Fr. Bacciarini will be back too to give some help to the elderly who are dying from hunger and cold. We are providing some shelter for them." (*La Divina Provvidenza, 1915*).

Father Guanella is still a whirlwind of faith and action...

II. Documents on the Congregation's purpose*

There are several documents: Statutes, Constitutions, Regulations, the magazine "La Divina Provvidenza." They record a list of activities that the Founder had under way or that were still in his mind. Let us mention some of them.

a) La Provvidenza (n. 1 - December 1892, p. 2s)

"The Little House of Divine Providence in Como gives hospitality to more than two hundred people, men and women, boys and girls, classified into seven main groups: 1) Priests, Sisters, and young ladies preparing to enter religious life; 2) elderly women abandoned or affected by chronic illnesses; 3) young and adult ladies waiting to find a job as housekeepers to surrounding families; 4) women and girls who are working at the House workshops (printing shop, silk shop...); 5) elderly, infirm, blind and mute-deaf men; 6) impoverished students; 7) boys in vocational schools (tailor, shoemaker, brick-layer...).

The Little House is open to all poor and needy people sent from everywhere.

b) Statute of the Victims of Divine Love (1892 or 1893)

Here, too, Father Guanella lists nine works of mercy and charity present in the House in Como (cfr. Opera Omnia, IV, p. 59).

The same House accommodates six more male groups of the poor (cfr. Opera Omnia, IV, p. 60).

He writes: "The Victims of Divine Love also undertake the direction of Sunday youth centers (*oratorio*) and catechism classes for children in surrounding parishes."

To have a real idea of the beginnings of our Guanellian ministry, it is useful to be reminded that the ministry also includes a list of purposes which are not directly related to welfare or relief.

* Cfr. don ATTILIO BERIA: "Il Beato Fondatore Don Luigi Guanella - Sintesi vivente / Spirito e Carisma".

We should not forget that “The Daughters of the Sacred Heart, born and developed under the protection of the Divine Heart, resolve to carry out perpetual adoration as well as the exercise of charitable works. Perpetual adoration is done day and night” (cfr. *Opera Omnia*, Vol. IV, p. 81).

c) Historical notes on the Institute of the Sons of the Sacred Heart (1898)

The Institute of the Sons of the Sacred Heart (*the House of Divine Providence*) is located in the most pleasant and healthy area of Como, on a thirty thousand square meter piece of land (7.5 acres), with new buildings for more than three hundred residents and well supplied by courtyards and vegetable gardens.

Currently about fifty members: Brothers, seminarians, and priests live in this house “*more religiosorum*,” that is, as religious living community life.

The members apply themselves to various ministries of charity by caring for about three hundred residents, divided into distinct compartments (families), namely: abandoned children, young orphans, trade students, students impoverished students, incapable elderly men, and incurable men of any age and condition following the pattern of the Little House of Divine Providence (*Cottolengo*) and of the St. Francis De Sales Oratory (*Bosco*) in Turin, whose characteristics Father Guanella studied for many years.

Presently, the House of Divine Providence in Como has hired instructors for arts and trades and teachers certified for elementary through high school, including the teaching to young candidates belonging to the newly born religious Institute.

The Sons of the Sacred Heart have also established a Catholic mission in Splügen (Switzerland) for immigrant workers from nearby Lombardy.

d) Statute of the Sons of the Sacred Heart (1898)

Purpose of the House

1. The purpose of the House is threefold: shelter, work and education.

2. The House shelters: *a)* abandoned children, orphans, disabled, blind, elderly, infirm, and needy of all kinds; *b)* youth and adults who have it in mind to withdraw from the world with the intention of spending their lives at the House doing works of charity for the poor, who are sheltered there.

3. The purpose of work is: *a)* to give something to do to the patients, because idleness is the root of all evil; *b)* to provide a trade to those who are in a position to learn it; *c)* to have an honest income for the House.

4. Education is combined with work, and it is given to the youth in trade-school. It is given with greatest care to those kids possessing more intelligence and piety and who are willing to enter the seminary (L. GUANELLA, *Statuto FsC 1898*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 911).

e) Constitutions of the Sons of the Sacred Heart (1899)

Their goal is to achieve their own sanctification by observing the evangelical counsels and by practicing the works of charity in general.

In particular, they dedicate themselves to the works of mercy by sheltering abandoned needy children, abandoned elderly men, terminal ill people, orphan boys, and retarded children.

They also dedicate themselves to the teaching and education of the youth in schools and Sunday youth centers (*oratory*) (L. GUANELLA, *C.FsC 1899*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 941; Eng. Ed. vol. 1, page 129).

f) Regulations of the Servants of Charity (1905)

1. A sensitive and believing Christian cannot pass by the indigent without aiding him. We know that one is a true follower of Jesus Christ if he is charitable towards the poor and the suffering in whom he sees a more vivid image of the Savior.

2. The Servants of Charity are especially blessed because the Lord entrusts to their care:

a) abandoned children, those with incompetent parents or in dangerous surroundings, children who are the delight of the Heart of Jesus Christ;

b) the aged, the chronically ill, retarded, disabled who, like the paralytic in the gospel, cry: “*I have no one!*”. To help so many miserable people physically and spiritually, disillusioned with the world and betrayed by human friends is indeed the act of the Good Samari-

tan, which brings the good fruit of the divine promise: “*Blessed are the merciful.*” The good Servants of Charity shall rejoice one day, for it is written: “*Blessed is he who understands and cares for the poor and the needy: in time of trial God will deliver him.*”

- c) A very important duty today is to come to the spiritual and corporal aid of our numerous brothers who, forced to move to foreign regions, often meet with moral and physical danger. Let us give thanks to Divine Providence who directed the Servants of Charity to establish a few churches, homes and boarding schools for the benefit of the suffering and for the children of the poor.
- d) A natural follow-up of these foundations is the erection of vocational schools for trades that are more useful in everyday life and in conformity with the abilities of the students.
- e) Equally needed and providential is the foundation of rehabilitation farming facilities (*colonia agricola*) for the mildly and severely retarded who, unable to perform higher functioning tasks, enjoy their rehabilitation in farming.

The works of the Institute of the Servants of Charity are multiple, but they are well connected and interdependent, forming one unit in the Institute which, from its inception, has been popularly called House of Divine Providence. (L. GUANELLA, *R. SdC 1905*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 1145; Eng. Ed. vol. 1, page 185).

g) Regulations of the Servants of Charity (1910)

We resume the outlines jotted down by Fr. Attilio Beria in his exposition to the 1970 General Chapter:

- The purpose of the Institute is to give shelter to those in need.
- Its service of charity is carried out by corporal and spiritual works of mercy.
- The recipients are children from poor families, elderly from low classes, and apostolic ministry:
 - among the children of poor families we should give preference to children rather than the elderly; to orphans; students with no means; trade-students;
 - among the adults we should give preference to those feeble in mind, physical strength and health; to those who are unable to provide for themselves; to elderly of any age and condition;

- apostolic life: pastoral ministry is one of the purposes of the Institute, and Servants of Charity priests can undertake parish ministry especially in mission territory. (L. GUANELLA, *R. SdC 1910*, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 1227; Eng. Ed. vol. 2).

In 1912

By orders received from the Holy See, the Apostolic Visitor Msgr. Balconi urged Father Guanella to cut out many programs and activities from his Institute. He insisted, in particular, to shut down the ministry to the elderly. Father Guanella agreed to limit his activities; however, he absolutely refused to renounce the ministry to the elderly. He even wrote an official letter (August 25, 1913) signed by him and by his General Council. In it he wrote: “*Since the beginning, sheltering the aged has been the purpose and reason for our ministry together with abandoned youth.*”

The conflict was resolved, personally, by the Holy Father when he took the case upon himself and approved the position of the Founder.

Among the many charitable ministries that survived at the death of the Founder, weathering the natural selection of time and voluntary abandonment, we offer a list, reminding the reader to check the biography of Fr. Mazzucchi where he can find the situation of the Congregation as it was in October 1915:

- Infirm and abandoned elderly
- Retired men and women
- “Buoni figli” - mentally disabled
- Rehabilitation Farming Facilities (colonie agricole)
- Children of school age
- Trade-students
- Catholic Missions (Switzerland)
- Immigrants and United States of America
- Pastoral Ministry and Parishes

III. Opinions held by Father Guanella’s contemporaries

The opinion that people held, regarding the activity of Father Guanella and the purpose of his ministry, surfaces in the comments that many gave at the time of his death. I would like to mention a few taken from “*La Divina Provvidenza*,” 1915.

The Mayor of Como: “... infinite crowd of beneficiaries, orphans removed from the dangers of the streets and ignorance; elderly helped in their poverty and abandonment; mentally handicapped taken out from inhuman situations; social poverties changed into useful and beneficial habitats... Intense work of charity, social welfare, and the general good of all, especially those more abandoned and unfortunate.”

On the holy card remembering his death: “Father Guanella was the father of the orphans, the friend of the poor, and the benefactor of the needy.”

L'Ordine (Daily Newspaper of Como): “... Facilities destined to heal many sick in body and soul, to comfort and aid many poverties, to give hospitality to many orphans, to many helpless elderly, to many mentally handicapped and infirm of every kind.”

L'Italia (Italian national daily Newspaper), quoting passages of Cardinal Ferrari's eulogy at the solemn funeral of Father Guanella, reports: “Under the protecting wings of his providential works of mercy, workers, elderly, needy, all the great and small poverties that are afflicting the earth find shelter and aid... Here are the works of Father Guanella: shelters for the most in need among the needy, the marginalized of society, those to whom no door would open, and to whom no hand offered any help... Tell me where I can do some good and there you will find me – he seems to say. He was found wherever there was poverty to heal, disgrace or sorrow to give compassion... In the Houses of Divine Providence all those who are in need of help (men, women, children elderly sick, handicapped, all the needy) are welcome and their necessities provided for... Father Guanella used to say: – I always considered myself an instrument of Providence. I would abandon everything if it is not wanted by the Lord.”

Il Corriere della Sera (Italian national daily newspaper): He understood that his mission was to react, as much as possible, against the most neglected afflictions. Why should we leave the disabled begging in the streets? Why were abandoned and orphaned children unwelcome in facilities suitable to them? In short, he was led in his ministry by one urge only: the necessity to integrate the actions of existing philanthropic institutes in order to give hospitality to all those who, for bureaucratic reasons or the gravity of their health or because they were coming from places outside the jurisdiction of those institutes or by many other impediments, could not receive hospitality from those institutes.”

Vita e Pensiero (Monthly magazine of the Sacred Heart Catholic University): Each of his foundations has its own story and its own characteristic: they are united to each other under the direction of Father Guanella. They find their coordination under his merciful banner that embraced the needs of all people in need: from a shelter for mentally disabled to a day care center for children, from a house for unmarried women to orphanages, from rehabilitation farming facilities to the welfare of immigrants, from grade schools to seminaries, from workshops to hospitals” (Mr Filippo Meda).

Conclusion

The following conclusion, written by Fr. Pellegrini before the 1970 Special General Chapter for the approval of our Constitutions, should be an incentive to read our Constitutions in a more creative way.

After reading these and other passages, each one should draw his conclusions and be free to express them.

Constitutions that present the purpose of the Congregation should describe the commitment the Founder entrusted to the Congregation in a historically accurate form, juridically binding, and spiritually filled with the faith, enthusiasm, and boldness shown by the Founder and that were approved. Constitutions should present an essential nucleus that should go above and beyond the narrow views and adaptations of a particular time. If necessary, a Reading Guide of the Constitutions should be published as an aid to understanding the context of particular eras and demands. Yet, without binding us too much, so that we can be ready to move towards other more urgent destinations of charity that may appear on the horizon.

Perhaps, we may have the secret wish to find in the Rule what we are asking from the Congregation more than what the Congregation is asking from us. It may be understandable! Even a good worker strikes a deal and goes to work for an employer that he thinks he is better than others and closer to his mind. Father Guanella did not go after the poor (employer) who were more accommodating. He went after the more indiscrete, the more suffering, exacting, and annoying.

He considered his Houses as “emergency rooms,” open all the time and available, or “waiting rooms” where the patient waits for admission to the hospital. A House or ministry like that, can hardly be framed around

the demands of technological perfection or exist within the scientific frame-work that we would like to give to our apostolate of charity. Maybe, we dream of a Rule demanding for us to be heroes of faith, ready to leave everything we are running and doing at present, in order to go and seek – Heaven knows where – other unspecified poverties and catastrophes.

I don't think so! We need a Rule that does not limit its range to the choices that were made in the past, or freeze positions that we reached in a particular period of time. We need a Rule that allows us to be happy at the end of our intense daily work, that reminds us of the splendor of our origins, and leaves an option here and there to some one of us who feels called to do something more, to discover new and more urgent poverties, and to allow the Spirit to lead him where He wants.

It is true: it is more a question of spirit than Rule. However, the Rule, too, is a means to form the spirit.

I would like to express my opinion: the statement mentioned above and made during the Chapter, to me, seems the better the more open and adequate to compare with the horizons – almost infinite – of the charity of the Founder. It is better than the last text of the Constitutions, *ad experimentum*, that listed a “catalogue” of poverties, undeniably ours yet too circumscribed to our times and maybe already outrun by the needs and the expectations of the people of God.

CLOSER EXAMINATION OF THE SECONDARY PURPOSE OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SdC

Fr. Piero Pellegrini

The following is another contribution of Fr. Piero Pellegrini, SdC, regarding the still valuable presence of residential facilities for boys. He wrote it at the time when, in Italy, those facilities were put into question. Such educational services to children in need and involved in particular difficult situations had dramatically changed, especially in the Western World. His contribution offers good suggestions regarding what the Congregation is doing in other countries, inspired by the original intuitions of the Founder.

There is an issue that is always taken up for endless discussion: the purpose and spirit of our Congregation, either regarding their knowledge and reflection or the practical consequences that they occasion.

I would like to mention a suggestion that came from one of the study groups: "Let us deepen the meaning of the charism of the Founder by studying his writings and activity, and the socio-cultural environment in which he carried out his work of charity."

Another suggestion was to create in the Congregation a "Centro Studi Guanelliani" (Guanellian Study Center). It brings to my mind the countless times that, since the time of Fr. Mazzucchi, confreres suggest such a thing. The 1970 General Chapter made a precise decision about it. Yet, during this Chapter (1975-1976) we are still discussing about words and their meaning. That shows clearly how undecided we are in formulating the purpose of the Congregation in our new Constitutions.

The opinions are decidedly divided into two parties: *a)* The Chapter should formulate the purpose of the Congregation in a generic way in order to allow room for new forms of charitable ministry (lepers, drug addicts, morally depraved, and any other new poverty); *b)* The Chapter should keep the traditional purpose, embraced by the Institute since its be-

* *Informazioni* n. 14, November 1976.

ginnings, with some variations that does not affect or change the “proper structure of the Institute.”

The focus of discussion is the recipients of our ministry, that is, the poor. However, which poor? The most poor? What kind of care is the Institute offering them?

A Chapter Father said in the assembly: “The research must be done through historical study of the Guanellian charism. It is highly improbable that the conclusion will be that Father Guanella chose the poorest of the poor in an absolute sense. He chose a category of poor: children and elderly because they were abandoned and in need of a home and a family.”

Other confreres held that the Congregation “should give its commitment to spread the kingdom of charity among the poorest. This could bring up another question: should we minister to other categories of the poor besides elderly, children and handicapped?”

Someone else said: “There is the impression that between purpose and recipients an incoherent pluralism of different purposes exists that is disorienting the young confreres.”

We are facing an uncertainty regarding principles, an uncertainty that is not helping us to work in tranquility of mind. There are even confreres, working in a particular field of the Congregation, who are criticizing others: “You are not working for the poor and for the poorest! If you truly want to be Guanellians, you better move to the Third World, even to the Third World of our country where the real needs are!”

Someone in the Chapter asked: “Are our institutions still meaningful? Are our parishes witnessing the Guanellian charism?”

It is annoying to insist on these matters. However, if there is dissatisfaction, weariness, and pessimism among some confreres, it seems that the reason is a lack of faith in the validity of our traditional institutions, as if everything is wrong and in need of an urgent radical change.

From all that criticism, it seems that only the few (*in 1975*) facilities for elderly and handicapped are on the right track, while the others are not.

Asking such questions means that we are aware of the problems of our time. Giving no answers and letting things work out by themselves, is irresponsible. Fearing them and fleeing from the field is surely the less Guanellian solution because we will probably abandon and leave behind many poor people.

Discussing charism and purpose means to nourish our faith in the Lord, author of all graces. Being rational about the poor and the poorest may be a good way to keep up with today’s social problems and follow today’s pedagogical methods.

If, after so much discussion, we still doubt being perfectly Guanelian - when referring to some forms of our ministry of charity - we better adjust, with the conviction that in the Church no religious is a sealed box, marked with the factory trade-mark that corresponds to its content. What is important is to firmly promote the kingdom of charity.

All the above leads us to reflect on two issues:

- one general: the presence of the Founder today in our communities and facilities;
- one particular: the meaning of the Guanellian presence in our facilities.

Presence of the Founder

When asked to prepare a report for the General Chapter on our religious life as Servants of Charity, with particular reference to the Founder, I thought it opportune to examine community life closely, as understood by Father Guanella, and to remodel it as much as possible upon our history and his writings. The purpose of the following quotes is to reevaluate certain forms of our ministry, not yet in oblivion but at times not taken sufficiently into consideration.

Because Father Guanella took inspiration from don Bosco, during the time he spent with him, it is useful to know more about that experience of life: the teaching of don Bosco about community life and how community life was lived out by the first generation of Salesians.

The first quote is from don Bosco and resembles some texts of Father Guanella himself:

“In this society (*Salesian Congregation*)... all members lead the common life, united solely by the bond of fraternal charity and simple vows that make them one in heart and soul for the purpose of loving and serving the Lord through the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience, and a way of life that is strictly Catholic. The bond that keeps the Congregations together is fraternal love. I believe that it is the hinge on which religious Institutes rest” (*La Comunità salesiana*).

What don Bosco had in mind when saying this is what the Salesians are trying to uncover today. One of them writes:

“According to the Salesian style, love among confreres is more effective than affective, resembling a large family in which par-

ents show mutual love to each other while working for the support and education of their children. Salesians are not parents without children. They are not concentrating their affection exclusively on their mutual relationship. They are parents of a large family, who for the most part, manifest their love by relating to their children, for whom they sacrifice their lives.”

He continues his examination by presenting this picture:

“For quite some time a question hammered in our mind: What is the charism of our religious communities according to the Salesian style? New forms and needs are getting our attention today regarding community life. For that reason it should be convenient to carefully analyze our Salesian life and tradition, and from there to pick up the essential elements and characteristics of our own community life. And our analysis will be rigorously documenting that the characteristic novelty of our idea of community is clearly not the one dealing with a community of religious dedicated to youth ministry, but of a team of educators who forms, together with their students, one educational community, one family.

An example could be found – though under a different characteristic – in the writings of Blouet on French seminaries. He wrote: “The three solitaries of Vaugirard explained their idea regarding the new ministry: by removing the separation between teachers and students, education will be the result of a total community of life between the two. Students will live side by side with teachers who will be more their companions in life than teachers.

Instead of having a community formed by confreres carrying out their separate role – a superior worried solely about administration and discipline, a treasurer exclusively absorbed by material concerns, teachers bent on their books, – and looking outside the house for ministries or relationships incompatible with their mission, we have a perfectly homogeneous community of true educators, true fathers of our kids to whose service they give their knowledge, experience, daily observations, and their delicate and attentive solicitude in common.”

Here is the theme we would like to examine:

“...Community life, among the first collaborators of don Bosco, consisted solely in their work for the youth entrusted to them under the direction of don Bosco himself.”

Like don Bosco, Father Guanella also underlined the preeminence of the bond of charity. His words are well known:

“The Congregation of the Sons of the Sacred Heart... is a pious union of Priests and Brothers united by the bond of charity and simple vows” (L. GUANELLA, *Costituzioni dei Figli del S. Cuore*, 1899, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 943).

“They must see that this spirit takes hold in the hearts of all the members of the family so that all may become one in action and affection, like grains of wheat: ground, mixed, and kneaded into one bread, which can later be offered at the community meal to revive the bodies as well as the hearts” (L. GUANELLA, *Massime di spirito*, 1889, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 22; Eng. Ed. vol. 1, page 47).

“Today’s communities, especially those of Religious Women and Men, are supported and bound together by the bond of charity. With this simple and noble bond of love they sanctify themselves and edify others. It is a great thing to be able to say, ‘I came willingly and here I stay, induced by nothing other than my own will, which I want always united to the most holy will of the Lord my God’” (L. GUANELLA, *Massime di spirito*, 1889, Opera Omnia, Vol. IV, p. 23; Eng. Ed. vol. 1, page 48).

It is the oldest text (1889).

Among the most recent:

“My first idea was the bond of charity. The idea of an approved Congregation came later” (*Fragmenta*, II, 13, p. 4, after 1912).

Father Guanella offers texts that show similarities to those of don Bosco’s. Like the Salesians, we Guanellians also inquire about the true meaning of the Founder’s words, and how they were practically carried out within the picture of daily religious life, a life that, as we know, was more intensely related to the residents than to community activities among confreres.

Regarding the analysis, previously made by the Salesians, we Servants should read the whole section of 1905 Regulations on the preventive system. In it, Father Guanella places the image of the Holy Family of Nazareth as the model and guide of the House. Around this perspective, all the activities of the House take shape: confreres and residents (including guests) are involved in carrying out the activities together.

Inside this family dynamic, the confreres can find the way to establish, among themselves, those special relationships that are the consequence of the bond of charity, whose purpose is to bind each other and their religious vows. And also, all those dwelling in the House, ward by ward, should live their family unity through their daily activities done together: prayer, school, and work should find confreres, residents and every person in the House deeply united into one educational entity, rightly called 'family.'

Probably, the image that the Salesians draw, plus a certain accentuation on the relationships among confreres, summarizes the first experience of Guanellian community life.

It is in this first experience, more than in the preventive system that lays out the true novelty of Christian pedagogy, novelty that at the time was gradually taking its shape in the families where formation, built on the severity of the authority, changes into a relationship more in tune with equality and dialogue. Father Guanella went through this experience in his own life: from his rigid authoritarian family style to the experience of a young "democratic" educator at Gallio Academy. Maybe, because of the influence of the formation he received and because of his personal needs, his formative interventions were not always coherent. However, his choice of a new formative system is undeniable.

It is interesting to note that in the Houses where this form of life is easily done and favored by the right atmosphere, confreres confirm the validity of their work, whatever the ministry may be. When there is a break among confreres and residents, a break that prevents the confreres from forming a "family" with the residents, we may frequently hear the embarrassing question: *is our Guanellian presence still meaningful? Is there any reason why our House is still open?*

My intention is not to over exemplify the issue and to exaggerate my reflection on those facilities particularly dedicated to youth. The form of group homes that is the most recent discovery of modern pedagogy (an alternative to residential programs in big facilities) all in all seems a specialization or another method on the general principle of making community-family with the boys. Two educators making community with a small group of youth is the "mini-model" of our same educational system. Still giving the proper recognition to our big facilities (usually a great weight on the shoulders of confreres), we have to reassert that at the center of a family not the structure but the heart.

It is what is requested, still today, to be true Guanellians.

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