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INTRODUCTION

Dear Confreres,

“Charitas” offers once again the most significant writings on the Congregation and for the Congregation that were published in the past. The main reason for their re-publication is based on the fact that they are still today a good contribution for a better knowledge of our charism and rich spiritual patrimony.

*- As it was done with issue 224, Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi remains the mandatory channel for Guanellian matters. There are many who have never known him in person. To them I will offer a brief biographical profile of him. Extremely precious is his long article **“In the Spirit of the Father”** that he published in Charitas n. 70 (Sept. 1940) on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Founder's death. It has already been published as a booklet by itself in different languages. Unfortunately, there are no more copies. So I take the opportunity to offer it to the confreres for their reading and meditation especially during this year, 2011, that has become a very important one in the history of the Congregation.*

*- A second article **“Looking, Listening, Pleading”** (also by Fr. Mazzucchi) is taken from Charitas n. 82 (Oct. 1943). It could be a good way to prepare ourselves for the canonization of the Founder. Let us meditate on it. It records the appreciation and love that Fr. Mazzucchi had toward Father Guanella whom he always considered a saint. It was Fr. Mazzucchi who worked for years for his Beatification, yet without seeing it here on earth. The Lord God had called him to eternal life seven months before (28 March 1964). It falls on us, on the day of the Canonization, to bring to Rome the joy and gratitude to the Lord for the hard work that Fr. Mazzucchi carried out for the benefit of the Congregation and for the glorification of the Founder.*

- We also remember the 100th anniversary of the **1910 Regulations of the Servants of Charity**. It is the most beautiful version of the Regulations left by the Founder. Soon, a new Italian edition will be published with some minor typographical changes for better reading and understanding. It was customary to give it to the new Novices - together with the Constitutions - on the day of their entrance into Novitiate. We should keep and continue that tradition for future generations of Novices.

- In *Saggi Storici*, (vol. 14, p. 239-269) I had found a well done presentation of the 1910 Regulations published by Fr. Pietro Pasquali, SdC, in 1998. I am offering it almost in its entirety. To me it is a great contribution to understanding the mind and heart of the Founder and, secondly, to better taste its spiritual content.

- Finally, we cannot forget Fr. Olimpio Giampedraglia, SdC, whose 30th anniversary of death we are celebrating this year. For ten years (1970-1980) he was at the helm of the Congregation as its Superior General. He left among us a vivid example of personal holiness. In particular, he encouraged us to see in the Heart of Jesus the most visible expression of the Guanellian charism, and the fountain from which to draw the running water of charity. In remembrance of him, I am pleased to re-present a lecture that Fr. Olimpio delivered in Rome at a seminar sponsored by the Dehoniani Fathers (Priests of the Sacred Heart): “**The Heart of Jesus and the Guanellian Congregations**”.

Greetings.

Father ALFONSO CRIPPA
Superior General

Rome, 24 October 2010

LOOKING, LISTENING, PLEADING

Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi, SdC

Fr. Mazzucchi writes this article when the world, Church and Congregation are going through a very dire moment of their history: in 1943 World War II was raging. Under those circumstances, he invites the confreres “to look at, to listen to, and to call upon” the Founder as a model of life and holiness in order to overcome those terrible days and be ready to give a hand to the suffering people.

It is not difficult to apply what he wrote years ago to our own days. We too are called today to propose more actively our spirit and charism to a world still “too wrapped into hatred and egotism”, still in need of holiness of life (like our Founder's) so that we may “make Charity the heart of the world”.

What I publish is not the literal text that he wrote, but a reviewing of it, safeguarding at the same time the mind and style of Fr. Mazzucchi that at times are very hard to understand even by native Italians. For that reason, I took the liberty to choose the most significant passages and to present them in a more fluid literary form, in order to facilitate the understanding and translation into other languages. (Note of the translator: the following text is the original one).

Fr. Mazzucchi was the best man ever to be able to interpret the mind and heart of Father Guanella, and to him we should always go as the most authoritative point of reference if we want to be faithful to the Founder.

He is offering us the fundamental aspects (though not the only ones) of the sanctity of Father Guanella, aspects that we should treasure and carry out in our own time.

* * *

Children who have the fortune to share a father with a big heart, a teacher of great teachings, a saint who constantly assists them, should “look at him, listen to him, and call upon him”.

In this time of sadness, anguish and anxiety, when not even the words of our Holy Father, inviting belligerents to love and peace are welcome, we should have recourse to the Founder. He is the last resource and the consolation of our prayer to the most powerful and merciful Lord. He is the authentic and authoritative interpreter of the divine will and mercy regarding our Institute. He is the tender and active mediator of our resolutions and needs in front of God.

God is to us an exceptional Father. He pours the beauty and riches of His divine mind and heart upon His creation, which has become the royal dwelling place of man so that he may use it to praise and love Him.

He is infinite Mercy, and He never abandons us even in our present day in which error and egotism seem to prevail over goodness.

The present hour, with its physical and spiritual dangers, is still a sacred hour belonging to God. We should not disregard this hour for it calls us to penance, to return mind and heart to sincerity, to proclaim the dignity of human life. It is an hour pressing us to conversion, to a return to the common Father.

I feel duty-bound to constantly recall to myself and my confreres the fact that we have to imitate the goodness of heart of Father Louis, who should be, in our eyes, the echo of the infinite divine goodness. In that way, by carrying out a religious life more active in the Guanellian spirit and work, we may reach the certainty that our Congregation is watched over and we all may reach eternal salvation. These are the two things that Father Louis had promised us before dying.

Particularly and practically, what is Father Louis' message to us and what is our message to him?

* Father Louis, like all saints, before being a teacher of a given doctrine had been a teacher of life. He had been a **Man Totally Dedicated to God**, living of Him and with Him.

God smiled on his soul since his childhood through the beauty of the sky and the peaks of the mountains. He made his heart fall in love with Him through the sweet intimacy of prayer while he, as a child, was watching over the family flock.

The Lord wrapped him with the cloak of innocence by keeping away the suggestions and snares of evil, and keeping his heart detached from the world.

He prepared his apostolic soul by bestowing on him the tenderness of his Divine Heart for the poor that he would help in the future. He had received a missionary vocation, a vocation spent for the spiritual and material benefit of the abandoned and those most in need.

* Dear to God and blessed by men as a **Man of Charity**, Father Louis belongs to the number of God's friends, the saints dedicated to Christian charity. They are the genuine interpreters of the Gospel and true imitators of the Divine Savior. They are those who had carried out in the Church the new commandment of love. Because of an irrepressible impulse of his heart, Father Guanella looked after any indigent person, and cared day and night for any suffering person he found laying in miserable hovels, in neglected streets, or among the ruins provoked by natural calamities.

He was still a seminarian when he began to aid the sick and the kids of his village, Fraciscio. At the seminary, he took care of one of his fellow seminarians who was gravely ill with great tenderness. Until his last months of life, he was on the road to save his brothers and sisters buried under the Marsica earthquake. Lasting flowers of his fruitful ministry of charity are the institutions that he founded in the Church. They are his inheritance to us.

* Father Guanella had been a **Man of Sacrifice**.

The example of his parents and the religious formation received in his family introduces him very early to a life of sacrifice. In the seminary, he will strengthen it by discipline and fidelity to his duties. His spirit of sacrifice will help him to overcome the inevitable difficulties that he will encounter in carrying out his vocation. Sacrifice will be a constant presence in opening and in stabilizing his Houses, always born in poverty and with not enough means... until his last painful agony.

Unsatisfied with the sacrifices demanded by the events of daily life how great they were! He added to them more extraordinary corporal penances that only great saints could have practiced.

* Father Louis had been a **Man of Intense Prayer**. Is that a surprise? He faithfully carried out what the Rule or the good of souls requested, and lived prayer with the intensity of a soul that was longing to converse with God. Prayer was a natural breathing of his spirit. Even the external posture of his body was revealing his absorbed fervor.

He was attracted to and in love with the Holy Eucharist, the inexhaustible

source of all graces that changes every Altar and Tabernacle into “our Paradise on earth”.

Because we wish to learn from him, teacher and father, let us follow his example and be encouraged by the assistance he had promised, to be our heavenly protector.

I believe and pray that the life and the examples of virtue of Father Louis - that are constantly embedded in our memory - may become the needed nourishment to our religious life, a norm to our life, and the soul of our ministry.

We should look at him, our great and dear father, especially now. We should listen to his teaching and exhortation again and again. We should ask for his heavenly protection that we may become more and more like him, souls totally dedicated to God, to charity, to sacrifice and prayer.

It is up to us to listen to him and to resolutely follow him!

* We too, as religious, have to be **Souls of God**, rich with God and His gifts.

Faith should illumine first our mind; it should inspire our resolutions, and mark our actions. It is faith that helps us to discover and meet the Lord in a chapel, in a superior, in a confrere, in those who suffer... In this way, whatever we do daily changes into a coherent exercise of piety, of religious obedience, patience, zeal and charity.

Sustained by this kind of faith, we too will enrich our souls with God's grace and will improve the life of our neighbor.

We should appreciate the precious gift of divine grace when we frequently appeal to God's help; and when we carefully follow all the precautions and observe all the rules that Christian morals suggest in keeping sin away from our personal life and from the Houses. Only when we possess the Lord and His grace can we give them both to our brothers and sisters!

* God is Love. **Humanity Longs for God. Humanity Needs Love.** Our times suffer a great hunger for love. No one, though corrupted or hostile, could remain totally insensible to charity.

Father Louis reminds us that any spiritual profit we may reach is favored by love. He asks us to approach souls with a great loving heart and kindness of manners. Several times he told us that there is no other way to have our Institute esteemed and loved except in the insuperable effectiveness of our humble charity, which assures us of the benevolence and support from both God and men.

* How providential is **the Spirit of Patience and Penance** that Father Louis invites us to embrace! Think about the normal demands of our ministry and community life: sacrifice is inevitable in our life! There is an advantage, however: by God's grace it can be meritorious. Blessed are we if we treasure our spiritual and physical suffering, the voluntary or the one imposed by outside causes! Our soul will ascend higher, and our apostolate will bear much fruit.

In their role, Superiors can and should commit themselves to carry out their responsibilities as an occasion to grow in the spirit of penance. Besides their individual penances, they have many occasions of suffering; like carrying out their daily ministry diligently, enduring patiently the moral poverty of their own and others, and giving to all the example of a Rule well observed.

* **“Prayer and Suffering”**

Constant and fervent prayer had been a great consolation to Father Louis in carrying his crosses. Likewise, prayer should become a way to trust in the Lord and to obtain from Him forgiveness and blessings.

The earthly pilgrimage of Father Guanella from leaving Fraciscio, from the devout visits to shrines he loved, to laying on his deathbed had been an interrupted murmuring of ardent prayers.

Our long or short pilgrimage of piety and charity here on earth will be like his if we implore God's blessing; if we obtain from Heaven the bread that nourishes the soul, heart and body of ours and of the numberless poor.

By spending time before the Blessed Sacrament we should be devout adoring souls we will receive advice and comfort from the Lord; we will obtain graces that will preserve us from individual or general adversities; and we will receive forgiveness for our own sins and for those of our neighbor.

At the Altar, where the august Sacrifice is offered, we will find the strength to immolate ourselves for the benefit of our brothers and sisters. It is there that we find the large supply of energy and grace we need. The Blessed Sacrament and the Holy Mass must be the center of our lives.

Father Louis went through times like ours today, and we have received from him some advice that should favor God's return into society.

“Christians should not be afraid of dangers, but should work with all their strength according to the inspirations of Divine Providence.”

“Great enterprises that will benefit a society in danger mature only in solitude and silence.”

“To get along well with people we must first get along well with God, Who is the way, the truth and the life.”

“Only charitable persons can plan their future with a serene mind and tranquil heart.”

“The fragrance of charity will reach Paradise when we immerse the gift of our charitable deeds into the Blood of Christ.”

“It is beautiful to weep with those who weep; but weeping for obtaining the eternal salvation of someone is more beautiful.”

“Love produces heroic acts of sacrifice.”

“To do good, one must ascend Mount Calvary.”

“Plant Jesus Crucified in your heart and thorns will resemble roses.”

“We can never stop as long as there are poor to be assisted, and needs to be relieved.”

“Your great comfort here on earth is to look at God and call Him: Father, Father!”

The article of Father Mazzucchi closes with a prayer to Father Louis.

O Father Louis, sustain us in our commitment so that we may become worthy children of yours! Listen to our filial prayer. At the sunset of your earthly life, when the violent storms of war broke out, you promised us - if we would be faithful to your spirit - a very particular divine assistance here on earth and the consolation of enjoying Paradise together.

Obtain for us, “martorelli e asinelli tuoi” (little martyrs and donkeys of yours = humble children of yours), to progress in virtue, to show constancy in good works and fortitude in trials.

Continue to protect our Houses which are facing financial needs and a dangerous war. Watch over the confreres, old, infirm and young especially those who are most in spiritual and material needs. Watch over those who are overseas, and those who are more exposed to the perils of war.

Grant that our Houses of charity and the fields of our holy apostolate be

spared from the war. May they expand and multiply in this afflicted and ravaged world according to the requests of the Church.

Grant that we may cherish your spirit so that each religious community through the combined efforts of superiors and confreres may be an oasis of true charity, kindness, ardent piety, exemplary life, edifying observance of the Rule, tireless work, and of confident trust in the Lord.

Grant that all confreres both those who are at the sunset of their life and those more numerous and enthusiastic who are young, may grow into immaculate, active, children of work and obedience, eager to do good and to please God.

May the loving eyes of the merciful Father and of the sweet Mother of Providence be always on us, forgive our failures, and grant the divine protection of his bounty always.

May Jesus Christ be praised!

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FATHER LEONARDO MAZZUCCHI, SdC, (1883-1964)

(This short biography of Fr. Mazzucchi should help confreres to discover the intimate bond that had existed between Father Guanella and Father Leonardo, and consequently - how valuable his testimony is)

In 1881 Father Guanella was appointed pastor of Pianello. There he befriended some families, particularly the Mazzucchi family: Natale (father), Domenica (mother) and four children born between 1876 and 1883, Alessandrina (who died at age 4), Alessandrino (who died at age 12), Salvatore (who got married), and Leonardo (the priest). Father Guanella felt obliged to stay close to this family that experienced so many deaths, but also rich in the gifts of nature and grace.

In 1883, he baptized Leonardo, somehow becoming his spiritual father.

In 1888, he convinced the parents to send the two brothers Alessandrino and Salvatore, who were attending school in Como, to the House of Divine Providence. His hope was that at least one of them would become a priest. In fact, Alessandrino very soon showed signs of a vocation to the priesthood. Leonardo too, perhaps under the influence of his older brother, began to show some interest for the seminary. In 1892, though only 9 years old, he applied to the seminary of the diocese of Como where he received First Communion and Confirmation. Father Guanella was his sponsor. From then on, Father Guanella took under his wings the boy who later on became a young seminarian. Leonardo grew up good of heart and quick in intelligence, but unfortunately not so strong in health, an issue that made him hesitant in pursuing a priestly vocation.

Leonardo had a question mark that tormented him for years while in the seminary: should I join Father Guanella in his apostolate of charity that is increasing more and more, or should I choose the more independent diocesan priesthood?

Of course Father Guanella, in his heart, wished to have Leonardo at his side; however, he never pressed the matter too far. Leonardo was aware that he had to make a choice sooner or later. Yet, he was still uncomfortable with some aspects of the Guanellian ministry.

The Spiritual Paternity of Father Guanella

Father Guanella was convinced that the true vocation of his “son” was the Guanellian religious life at his side and at the service of the poor. He saw it from external signs and interior dispositions in Leonardo or that Leonardo himself disclosed to him. However, he never mentioned anything of the kind to him. Only when Leonardo became a priest, Father Guanella openly told him so. In the meantime, the spiritual paternity of Father Guanella was filling in for the paternity of his natural father - who had died when he was 7 - and became a more significant leading presence in his life.

It is clearly expressed in the several letters that Father Guanella wrote to Father Leonardo, who always treasured them with great affection, starting from the one he had received at his First Communion.

Father Leonardo, from 1906 through 1915, was to Father Guanella the closest collaborator and confidant, the confrere with whom he shared many vicissitudes, but also the confrere who understood better and more deeply his mind and soul. Father Mazzucchi preserved forever in his heart the memory of the Founder, and the filial relationship of a beloved disciple. When he became his successor in leading the Congregation, Father Mazzucchi never ceased reminding the confreres that Father Louis is a father to whom they should turn and pray.

Finding in him the necessary patience and the right ability, Father Guanella entrusted to him the formation of novices, the editing of the magazine “La Divina Provvidenza”, the role of personal secretary and councillor, plus the task to follow the process of beatification of Sr. Clare Bosatta and Catherine Guanella, with an opening to a third one, Alessandrino Mazzucchi, his older brother.

In 1910, Father Guanella summoned him to be a member of the General Council together with Father Aurelio Bacciarini.

Father Mazzucchi took advantage of it for searching the heart of the father to understand his intentions, memories, and projects. He stored in his memory everything, and everything he wrote down. Today, those memories are collected under the Latin title “*Fragmenta Vitae*” or “*crumbs of life*” as he loved to call them.

Father Mazzucchi even convinced Father Guanella to write his autobiography whose purpose was to make known to the general public the wonders of the Ways of Providence.

The last years of Father Guanella were marked by trials, not only

because of endless difficulties from outside, but also because of difficulties within the Congregation itself.

To be approved by the Holy See, the Institute was in need of a certain regular life and unity. That unity had a hard time showing up, however. There was, unfortunately, a minority of influential confreres who were refusing to follow the Founder in his plan to organize the confreres into a religious Congregation with vows recognized by the Church.

Father Mazzucchi inherited the situation. With filial love toward the Founder, he employed all his meekness and firmness in carrying out the necessary religious formation, and in reminding everyone in season and out of season of the figure and the authentic spirit of Father Guanella.

He strengthened the Congregation in its religious life and organization until the Institute received its approval from the Holy See.

He collected the spiritual and biographical memories of Father Guanella: writings, pamphlets, and correspondence. He wrote the first biography of the Founder, his personal vicissitudes and foundations. Today, it is still the most comprehensive biography ever written regarding the Founder. He authentically interpreted the Founder, his spirit and charism.

He opened the first seminary in Fara and the novitiate house in Barza for the Congregation.

He organized the charitable ministry of the Institute into three major fields: abandoned youth, handicapped, and elderly.

He opened the first Houses in South America, beginning with Argentina and moving to Brazil just before War World II. He organized the diocesan and apostolic processes for the beatification of the Founder until they were concluded.

Those are just a short list of the many undertakings that Father Leonardo had carried out.

It is impossible to separate his person and his work from the Founder. We may even identify him as a co-founder.

Toward the end of his life, Father Guanella foresaw that his “son”, already grown up and mature, would be called one day to lead the Institute. In fact, the Founder held informal inquiries with other confreres like the general councillor Father Silvio Vannoni who, later on, would become vicar-general of Father Mazzucchi. It was clearly a way to pass on his mission and spirit to him.

In 1946, when the Congregation gathered together to elect a new Superior General, Father Mazzucchi had exceeded any limit permitted by

the Rule: 22 years. The new Superior General was Father Luigi Alippi. But Father Leonardo was elected his vicar general, and for many years he continued to work tirelessly for his confreres.

The year 1964 had been a year of great joy for the Beatification of Father Guanella proclaimed by Pope Paul VI. It was October. Forty-nine years from his death. It was the day that Father Leonardo longed to see, but he did not see it. Seven months before March 28, 1964 death brought him into eternal life to anticipate the earthly glorification of his old pastor of Pianello, the one who had baptized him, and had become his father for the sole purpose to spread in the world the kingdom of Christ's charity.

* * *

It is possible to find out Father Guanella's influence on Father Mazzucchi through the vast correspondence they had with each other. Today, we have those letters. Father Mazzucchi kept them, firmly believing that Father Guanella was his "sweet father", a father he always turned to with "filial love."

For further information regarding these letters, see "Don Guanella inedito negli scritti di Don Pellegrini" (p. 430-446).

IN THE SPIRIT OF THE FATHER

Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi, SdC

Foreword to the publication of this document was written by the Center for Guanellian Studies

The following document was written by Father Leonardo Mazzucchi and we are offering it to the confreres for the 135th anniversary of the Founder's birth, and the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the Servants of Charity.

We have chosen these pages among many others because they bear a more comprehensive witness to the Founder, a better knowledge of his writings, a better synthesis of his doctrine on the spirit and purposes of the Guanellian Congregations.

Who Father Mazzucchi had been and how much the two Congregations owe him is well known by older confreres and Sisters. For twenty years, he was the most intimate confidant of Father Guanella. For almost forty-six years he was the privileged depository of the Founder's memory and will, a person knowledgeable without par of his writings, and an untiring reader of them. For three generations of Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and of Servants of Charity, Father Mazzucchi was the major living expert of their Guanellian spirit.

Unfortunately, time has come that we have to start all over again. There is no doubt that the Servants of Charity belonging to the fourth generation, (but also some of the third generation), are not very familiar with the first forty years of our Institute. Events that were of substance to our Congregation are perhaps completely unknown to them. Even names of confreres who were cornerstones to the Institute mean nothing to them. However, this is not the place to talk extensively about that. We only mentioned it for the sole purpose of emphasizing how authoritative the article is that we offer to our readers.

Yet, a more pressing and higher intention has urged us to propose

this article for your meditation. The spiritual richness of these pages is not just something from the past. On the contrary, they compel us to treasure the inheritance of the Founder, and to find new ways to put it into practice. The testimony of Father Mazzucchi regarding the Founder's doctrine, spirit, and work, evidently cannot have the same value and equal force as ours.

Everything that this article contains regarding our founder, Father Guanella, and his personal charism should be considered by the Guanellians as precious as the relics of saints. We are grateful to the Lord for having granted us such a tremendous witness of authentic Christian life.

The doctrine of Father Guanella should be studied and complemented by other Church sources. Something had been started, but mostly it is still unfinished. For instance, guidelines regarding ascetical practices carried out by individuals or by religious communities carry the mark of Church laws of the Founder's time. Updating them becomes a must in regard to the operational aspect of our ministry. We need to update our charitable answers according to the needs of our present time, because they are different from those experienced by Father Guanella. They are situated in a very different ecclesial and social context.

What is immutable guarantees our identity and is a firm anchoring to our origins. The expansion of the Institute is guaranteed by the right approach we would have regarding the new social conditions. The dialogue between identity and growth of an individual is an inexorable law that affects any living organism, even a religious Institute. It is difficult to harmonize such dialogue. Therefore, we need some Guanellian who will be able to carry out faithfully the original Guanellian spirit and be open to the unpredictability of Divine Providence.

It is necessary to form ourselves upon solid teachings, like the following teaching of the Founder that the Center of Guanellian Studies in Rome offers to the greater Guanellian Family.

Father Leonardo Mazzucchi wrote this article for the edification and spiritual improvement of religious life in our communities on the occasion of the solemn celebrations that were organized by the two Guanellian Congregations for the 25th anniversary of the death of the Founder, Father Louis Guanella. It was published in Charitas, n. 70, September 1940, p. 1-23. The cover title is not the original. To make it easier to read, some sub-titles in Italics have been included, and a few adjustments in the punctuation.

Twenty five years later

Memories and thoughts of an unforgettable day

Already 25 years - a long and short period of time went by since Father Louis Guanella, our sweet and unforgettable Father completed his earthly pilgrimage, and set off for the heavenly call, for his ascent into everlasting life. It was a hard working and heroic, an enlightened and enlightening journey of 72 years, 10 months, and 5 days.

October 24th was a day of human sorrow and divine trust as well. Today it is written in golden letters in the book of God and in the heart of his disciples and tomorrow - perhaps perpetually it will be added to the glories of the Church (the only true glory here). In that mournful yet joyous day of passage from earth into heaven, into the true and worthy life, a great light was extinguished here on earth. It was, however, extinguished only to be rekindled, more brilliant and more beneficial, up there.

His spiritual children, the Servants of Charity and the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence, wept over his death. Hundreds of poor little ones felt sad about it. They were, indeed, the chosen ones of Father Louis' heart, and they knew it. Numberless admirers and friends, the benefited as well as the benefactors bowed their heads, deeply moved in veneration. Though sorrow enveloped our hearts; though funeral fixtures covered the deathbed, the coffin, the church for the funeral; though the toll bells were pealing their sad call, yet an intimate joy seemed to fill up our souls. It was a moving feeling of joy full of trust that heavens were open; a joy coming from words still alive in our ears; a joy of a bright future; a joy of treasured teachings; a joy of a future protection.

The worthy confrere (*Fr. Aurelio Bacciarini*) who received his inheritance wrote to us: "Our most loving Father is no more! His great heart that had beaten with such great affection for us beats no more. His sweet eyes that looked on us with fatherly tenderness are closed in the darkness of death. The holy hand that had blessed us every day is cold and rigid! Oh Father! Oh Father! Are you listening to us? It is your children who call upon you, the ones you left weeping in this earthly exile, we poor orphans! Look upon us from Paradise. Guide our steps until the hour comes when we too will be reunited to the Father in heaven and will be embraced by the ecstasy of eternal life."

He continued by instilling in our hearts a much-desired peace: "Now

his earthly talk is over. His blessed soul has begun the heavenly discourses with the Saints, with the Angels, with Our Lady of Providence, with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with the Trinity of God, the divine Mystery that he always adored with profound devotion. And he will mention us to them. He had promised it to us on his bed of suffering. This is a comforting thought that dries out our tears and gives strength to our steps that without him look uncertain.”

For all of us who had lived with him and had a place in his heart, his promise of assisting us here below is a great comfort, if we remain his true sons. You remember him telling us that we were not always capable of understanding his great and ardent heart! It is a comfort remembering his promise and his good-bye to heaven. His example of virtue together with the wisdom of his instructions is a precious inheritance.

Thus his holy successor concluded and promised on our behalf: "We will all continue, serene and strong, the work entrusted to us by the Lord, inherited from such a good Father, and sealed with our unalterable attachment to the Institute. In this Institute we want to live, we want to die, and we want to consecrate ourselves and to immolate ourselves as on an altar. One day, placing before God our poor broken being, we will say like our holy Founder: *"I carried out the task you gave me...Now I return to you."*

Precious Relics of his spirit

For thirty years, from the time I was born in Pianello to his death, Father Guanella was a father and incomparable master to me. Unworthily, I had been the recipient of an incalculable amount of affections and spiritual gifts from him. On this happy anniversary, for my own sake and for the sake of my own confreres, I would like to mention a few details on the mind, heart and life of Father Louis, taken from his personal correspondence to me, always with the sole intention of preserving for you and transmitting to you every precious fragment of his teaching and directives.

"Rejoice greatly in the Lord ... Tomorrow we, too, will celebrate the fifth anniversary of the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the House." (February 1, 1893).

"I recommend much spirit of piety and abnegation. Beg for everything from the Infant Jesus!" (December 17, 1898).

"God is good to everyone and to those who serve Him as you do" (December 25, 1901).

"Remain tranquil in the hands of God and of your superiors. Trust in the intercession of your holy brother who watches over you from heaven with complacent love." (May 2, 1902).

"Be a second little Alexander and you will be the consolation of many hearts." (June 27, 1902).

News and concerns

"I am sending you the special blessing that the Holy Father imparted on you at a private audience on this past October 30th... The Holy Father had words of encouragement for all the Houses, especially for the one in Monte Mario here in Rome." (October 31, 1903).

"Attend to your study and to your meditation. Never omit Holy Communion and give to your town as much good example as possible" (December 22, 1903).

"I am glad that you view earthly life as a battlefield, ecclesiastical career as a war, and priestly life as a constant battle. Members of the Socialist party dedicate themselves to demolishing society and they even die for their cause, while our self-giving and immolation are for the well-being of society and for eternal life. We should believe in our ministry at least like them... Study, pray, and hope" (Easter, 1904).

"With great effort detach yourself from men if you desire to be united to God more intimately... With the doctor's permission I will be able to celebrate Mass tomorrow. It is a negligible influenza, just a bit of an annoyance" (December 15, 1904).

"Be strong in the battles of virtue: you will find great comfort in them" (4 December 1904).

"In choosing your occupations, trust in Divine Providence" (November 30, 1905).

"Those who are called to a higher position must suffer much in order to accomplish more... Do you not see the Immaculate Virgin who is full of love as well as sorrow?... You, who from being a servant are going to become a confidant and a friend of Jesus Christ, you must well understand the mysteries of the love and sorrow of Jesus Christ Himself... Yesterday I visited the tomb of St. Stanislaus and saw a marble statue representing him dead in his bed: a monument of art and piety. May we all imitate him, this angelic young man!" (December 5, 1905).

"I think it is unnecessary to remind you that religious life is far more

secure and meritorious than a life in the world" (December 20, 1953).

"I am visiting the Houses in Veneto and Romagna, and then I will reach Rome... The work multiplies under my hands and I certainly need strong and effective cooperators." (28 April 1906).

"I am expecting to have another priest in the beginning of July, a priest who holds a doctorate degree, who has resolved to join our Institute. He will do great good among us." (May 28, 1906). (Note: He refers to Fr. Bacciarini, doctor in theology).

"I recommend prayer and application so that you may be more appealing and understandable in teaching and preaching. I recommend you to use examples and stories, easily drawn from many sources. Read the Stories of Father Bosco, the Sacred History, and the Church History... Be humble and pray to the Lord to be more and more according to his Sacred Heart." (January 4, 1907)

"Have you begun to preach and teach clearly? Do they understand you? Remember to quote frequently examples and stories." (February 19, 1907)

"The approval of the two Institutes seems almost reached, and I will be back soon." (July 22, 1907)

"I am a little indisposed, but I hope to be back from Rome very soon." (July 30, 1907).

"I will leave London tomorrow and I will be among you soon." (September 14, 1908, from South Kensington Hotel, London, UK)

"You, Master of novices, what are you doing? Are you praying for them? Are you preceding them by your example? Are you annoying them over minor details? Do they love you more than fear you? Are you a father in holiness, able to generate spiritual children to virtue? In pursuing that, are you able to follow the "via media", the middle way called discretion? What do you do to become an expert spiritual director? Regarding discipline, are they loving you or just respecting you? I wish you do not show excessive weakness. Don't worry! Make up for the weakness of nature with the power of determination and the help of divine grace. Speak little and demand much. Let your demeanor be like that of a lamb, which is capable of keeping the threats of the wild beasts far away. Be strong and go ahead! The Holy Father lovingly blesses you and your novices." (November 1, 1910).

"I add for you: 'Blessed is the man who undergoes temptation'... because he will soon hear 'behold the faithful and prudent servant whom he has sent. He who trusts in the Lord shall not be belittled'. You know that the Institute does not rely on man but on God. He will come, the 'God that resists

the proud; the God that scatters and gives to the poor'. Meanwhile, it is also necessary to act 'strongly yet sweetly'. Besides, when you carry out a task entrusted to you by God himself, you must fulfill it the best you can, so that the word of Scripture may not apply to you: 'Cursed may be the man who does not dip his sword in the blood of the enemy'. Meanwhile, 'keep an eye on yourself and on sound doctrine'. You have in your hands good doctrinal material to pass on: attend to this. Attend to your novices and collaborate with people who can help you 'in a spirit of truth.'" (January 28, 1911).

"Pray for my sister, the mother of Father Sterlocchi, who had died recently. She led a holy life for 87 years." (August 28, 1911).

"Give me some news... on the seminarians whose good formation we cherish very much. Make them understand the value of the Holy Father's blessing... Keep in mind that virtue lays in the middle. Be sorry for your defects and those of others. Remember that you have to carry out a determined war against them until you will reach their extermination." (November 10, 1911).

"Do not fear the thick walls of spiritual fog, because you can conquer any dangerous temptation... Say hello to your good young seminarians. Lead them happily to the salutary pastures of virtue and academic proficiency." (December 17, 1911).

"When you will achieve half of my life-experience, you will see that what now seems to you mere illusions, it is instead reality. Today I was in the Vatican and I got good news regarding the completion of the new church, which, they say, is one of the best among the new ones built in Rome... Greet your novices, seminarians, and lay brothers for me. Sunday evening I will probably attend an audience with the Holy Father. I will mention them to him." (December 17, 1911).

"Be generous! Rather be very generous! Be concerned mainly for essential things, as you mentioned in your last letter." (November 16, 1912).

"I am sending you material for the magazine...: modify it here and there especially when it lays bare the defects of priests. Shame on us, if we priests do not do what we are supposed to do! Let us pray, pray, pray for ourselves, poor sinners too." (November 20, 1912).

"The Holy Father gave me a blessing because I am leaving Italy around December 12th with the Superior of the Scalabrinians, who strongly support me for a female foundation (Note: in the United States of America), and then for whatever will happen... Pray to the Lord for my safe departure and subsequent return. Please, do not spread this news around!" (End of November 1912).

"The article in the newspaper is inaccurate (too many praises of my person!). Beware of reproducing it!" (From Boston, December 31, 1912).

"I am comforted that you feel the effect of the Apostle Paul's words: 'In Christ Jesus I have begotten you'... I am pleased that you understand that men's words can be useful sometimes. But the grace of God is much more useful. In fact the Lord works patiently in human hearts like an artist who uses his chisel on the marble he wants to turn into a beautiful statue... The pain you feel in your soul is like that chisel that works in a Christian heart and bears fruit... Above all and always trust in Divine Providence!" (February 13, 1915).

Divine Providence

"Above all and always trust in Divine Providence!" This is the simple and inspiring advice that Father Louis gave to himself first, and repeated over and over to his spiritual children when dealing with the circumstances of their life: consolations and tribulations, disappointments and extraordinary interventions of God's goodness, satisfactions and delusions, sadness and joy. One would never finish if he wants to list them all.

"Providential". In saying and thinking the word "providential", Father Guanella makes reference to his relentless struggles, the many contrasts and anxieties, the unending traveling that he had endured. Trails and hardships accompanied him from the years of his early schooling and seminary, to his going to Savogno, to the humiliation of having been denied the parish of Caspano, to his time spent in Piedmont, to his recall to his diocese, to his temporary staying in Traona and Olmo, to his being appointed to Pianello, and to his going to Como.

Still from the very beginning of his ministry Father Louis attributed his personal sustenance and later that of his foundations - to the unfailing assistance of God's providence. In Savogno he described his life and his untiring activity: *"He was rich with the poverty of his parishioners... trusting only in the help of Divine Providence. He saw himself favored by Him, and he knew no difficulties."* In Traona: *"Little by little Providence gave me the means to pay most of the expenses that we had incurred."* And again: *"Divine Providence helped us day by day."* And farther on: *"We lived on Providence, and nothing was ever wanting."*

The constant experience of divine assistance helping him in situations of financial straits and in supporting the large amount of

charitable ministry done years before in Pianello, gave him the occasion to pass on to the confreres an old saying of Christian and pastoral economy. *"If we learn to live on divine Providence rather than on stipends, we would be better off; people would love us more, and we would do a much greater good in their midst."* The history of the foundations he had began and built up, is a history of Providence. There is nothing to marvel at. Many years earlier he had written to his Bishop: *"It seems to me I should trust more than ever in the Providence of the Lord."* He knew how to be a docile instrument of Providence, as he added in his letter to the same Bishop: *"With the guidance that comes from above, I have much more strength; without it, I do not feel strong enough to take a step ahead"*.

The living canticle of Divine Providence

Miracles of Providence followed. They were like delightful stanzas of hymns of thanksgiving that he was singing to Divine Providence. They were part of his life as well as an admonition to his spiritual children.

"The House ... was set up... without funds, without means of human providence. Actually, a little shower of more or less steady donations rained down over the House according to needs and circumstances..."

"It was noticed that if we built for five or ten, money came for five or ten. However, it stopped when we trusted less in divine Providence."

"I have experienced that if we work for ten, it comes for ten. If we work for a hundred, it comes for a hundred. Money was lacking when we became discouraged and had little trust."

"We must admit, to the glory of divine Providence that the necessary was never lacking."

"When a construction work has begun, divine Providence suffers if we do not reach its completion. Once the Lord opens a way, He wants us to speedily take the opportunity, because it is the way of the Lord."

"When divine Providence has opened a way, we must not waste any time, but we should hasten and follow it."

"The Lord is a good Father to us. And it is impossible and absurd that he should leave the children who trust in Him without the necessary help."

"It is good to rely on the right intention of people and their financial means. However, it is much better to open our foundations having little or nothing, and trusting above all in God."

Theological and Ascetical Cues

"Never displease Divine Providence in the least. Treat Her as the Queen of your House. Do not welcome into your home any person unpleasant to her, nor close your door to anyone who you know is dear to Divine Providence, Queen and Mother. Do no harm whatsoever to her, not even in small things. In the House, do not put in the last place one that should occupy the first place; I mean, the poorest, the most abject and abandoned person, because the Lord is the guardian of the poor children and of the abandoned. Do not fear discomfort or poverty; for the invitation, or rather, the command to prefer the most abandoned people comes from God, who expressly declares: 'Welcome this abandoned one and feed him for me, for I will give you a reward for it.'"

"Give the preference to the applicants who are without human support. They should be considered the favorite ones of Divine Providence. These are the ones who attract from the Lord special blessings upon the House."

"The House of Divine Providence must set its aims high and see to it that the House is filled with persons in need because they are those dear to God. Therefore they are more apt to have heavenly graces rain down on the House. Let me say it again: the Servants of Charity must have much faith because, by occupying the office of receiving those who ask for assistance, they hold in their own hand the keys for opening and closing the doors to those sent by the goodness and love of the Lord."

"Good cannot be done except by ascending the tiring road of Calvary, with the firm conviction that the Lord has never failed those who trust in Him. The bread is always sweet when it comes from the hands of the provident Lord, sweet especially when it costs sweat and fatigue."

"We should open a House according to principles and criteria of faith, and never according to human prudence. The soul of a House and the secret of its success is confidence in God. If we rely on human aims though they are useful we may ruin the whole foundation just begun."

"Serious offenses to God should never be committed by anyone in the House. Those who seem to work in the House unwillingly like they are forced, or those who lead a reproachable conduct, show themselves to be unworthy to stay at the House of Divine Providence."

"We open Houses for the needy by trusting above all in the assistance of Divine Providence. Do not care about increasing your financial assets, but employ in the service to the poor whatever Divine

Providence sends you. Trust in the teaching of the Lord who says: Give us this day our daily bread; seek the kingdom of God, and temporal things will be given besides."

"Since Divine Providence is a good and powerful Mother, let everyone seek to follow the way she points out because failing to do that would be like going back... We must always beg God so that He may increase our faith and guard us against the danger of human prudence."

"On one hand we need to possess much spirit of prayer, much spirit of piety and mortification, much spirit of faith in Divine Providence, who is rich, great, and sublime. On the other hand, we should take great care for the virtues of poverty, abnegation, and religious sanctity that send upon us the favors of the Lord."

"The Institute was born in the midst of great opposition and in great poverty. It has been entrusted more to the Providence of God than to human prudence. It must now continue its way and show to the world - by words and deeds - that God provides for his children with the solicitous care of a Father."

"The treasurer must be a man of faith because the existence of the Institute and its finances are based above all on the assistance of Divine Providence."

"We must always put our trust in Providence who provides for everything. The Houses that begin with nothing are the ones which prosper."

"If we do not trust we do not allow Divine Providence to intervene. That does not mean that we can escape suffering. The cross is heavy on our shoulders: to do good, we must ascend Calvary."

"If we have no trust, our House is lost. We must trust in Providence and have confidence in the future of the Institute. Sometimes we are in dire difficulties because we have little trust. Providence has its own timing for intervening; however, not everyone is a recipient of her assistance. We must trust."

"It is easy for the Lord to find the means necessary for the construction of Houses for the poor and Churches for the faithful. We need faith!"

"Fill the House with the poor of the Lord; they will draw upon you his heavenly blessings."

"To receive with two hands from Divine Providence we must give to her poor with four hands."

"Give much and willingly, so that divine promises may come true: Give and it shall be given to you."

"We use to pray in our Houses the Chaplet of Divine Providence: Most holy Providence of God, provide for us! Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us! And the Lord, who sees, provides."

"We need to pray a lot. The Lord's Providence turns her face from us when we sin and when we are lacking in trust."

"Our House takes the name of Divine Providence because it has a very strong faith in her. Without her help it would never have started, nor could have expanded nor maintained itself and prospered."

An indispensable Duty and a dutiful Promise

I had just mentioned only a few of the humble yet sublime expressions of Father Guanella that display his glowing charity and great trust in Providence. He quoted them often in his precious but few valuable writings that are the fruit of his life-experience and teaching. When he was talking to us, he made many references to them in an attractive and moving way.

The attractive beauty and wealth of these teachings make them practical, practicable and meant to be practiced. They make the mind, heart and soul of Father Louis shine with the beautiful light of a teacher and apostle. I know that I had lingered on them more than necessary. Yet, I believe that it was useful to have mentioned here part of what I have already written more extensively elsewhere. It should be commendable in the future to re-publish my work for the benefit of others.

My dear Confreres, all of us will celebrate the upcoming 25th anniversary of his blessed death (1915 - October 24 - 1940) with renewed fervor by raising prayers for his glorification here on earth. Are we faithful, at least, to make the prescribed hours of Eucharistic adoration with the new intention for a Christian peace among peoples? In every House, especially here in Como, let us remind ourselves, and the family of our affectionate friends and benefactors, of this special event through particular solemn celebrations and public commemorations. Let peace be also the necessary and provident way to consolidate and develop his and our Institute. Let our prayer be an occasion for a greater spiritual profit for us and for the good of the entire common family of the redeemed. The Founder had entrusted to us his inspiring spirit of charity and faith. May they nourish more and more our thoughts and resolutions, and, especially at this time, may they become the norm and model of our activity.

Trustful in grave moments

Ours are times in which a world of beliefs, systems, ideas and regimes are overturned from their foundations. Today there is a general discomfort among nations. They are unsettled and disoriented. In the darkness that envelops the world there appear sinister lightning and fearful threats of an apocalypse that threatens to sweep away our civilization. It compels us to fear that Providence - too disregarded and provoked - may not be our protection and salvation anymore. That may be the cause of discouragement among people, and even of the ungrateful and irreverent grudging among believers.

It is refreshing and even opportune in this kind of situation to look at the shining and pious, serene and encouraging person of Father Louis Guanella. He is one of those few great men that the Lord raises up as to guide people to salvation. He reminds us every day to keep an active faith in God's Providence.

The Founder was good in adapting and sharing with common people the profound thoughts and wise conclusions of the Christian philosophy of history. He was used to narrate in a few words the battles and triumphs of the Catholic Church and of our Christian civilization across the ages. He was used to warn the faithful on the danger and treachery of those promoting unbelief and libertinism. Under the tragedy of some calamities, he enlightened the faithful, through the light of reason and faith, on the merciful plans of God who at times has to punish humanity. However, through that same suffering He saves it also. Through homilies and modest publications, he frequently hailed the Saints as great intercessors, and urged his people to love them.

Father Louis wanted then and wants now that in every earthly contingency, however grave and tragic they may be, we should never fall into the pit of despair or mistrust, fruit of a discouraged and discouraging pessimism that is pure cowardice and selfishness. Often our Holy Father Pius XI had pointed out how fortunate we are in living under these exceptional times because we cannot be content of being mediocre Christians, but men of great virtues and actions.

Father Guanella was aware that the world or a country or an individual can keep their Christian faith and virtuous life, or even return to God, only because of the powerful mercy of the Heavenly Father. He never ceases to assist us with his inspirations and his help. He sent Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth to bring and to distribute, through the infallible and

indefectible Catholic Church, the perennial treasures of truth and grace. It is through Jesus that the Father accepts our supplication and acts of reparation, so that his mercy might triumph over his justice that we had offended. How I would like to quote here the beautiful words gushing forth from the ardent spirit of Father Louis Guanella!

The great motivation: God is a Father

God is a Father of incomparable and inexhaustible bounty for each one of his children, even the smallest and the most contemptible one. Father Louis took inspiration and nourishment for his spiritual formation and ascetical direction from the divine beauty of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the ineffable Author, Example and Master of divine charity and goodness. Likewise he urged his spiritual children to nourish their piety, and the piety of many others, from putting all their trust in the mercy of God, and to resolve to live a life of charity.

He turned this spirituality of his:

- into a valid spiritual formation;
- into a convincing exhortation of acquiring perfection and progressing in Christian and religious virtues;
- into a joyful and generous gift of every intellectual, moral and physical energy for an untiring service to God and souls;
- into an inspiration to live out humility, a virtue that silences complaint, discontent and pretences;
- into the happiness of a soul that is content of God, and accepts gladly and peacefully sacrifice and trial from Him.

The Gospel practiced by our Father Louis visibly shows the goodness of God who is a loving and provident Father toward his creatures. He wills our good when not impeded by our resistance and by our refusal. He wills the salvation of our soul, the possession of eternal life, and whatever is necessary for our life here on earth.

The practice of self-denial lived out by all the Saints reminds us of the Gospel. Our Founder is one of Saints who believed in the heavenly Providence of God Who never fails to feed the birds of the air, to clothe the lilies of the field in splendor, and to assure individuals, families and societies of the abundance of material goods. It is the Providence of God that provides even those goods that greed and human egotism want to accumulate, to fight

for and to kill, as we experience today. Our lack of trust (worse still if allied with sin!) can deprive us of what we need. The necessary is assured by the prodigies of Christian charity and, for those who believe, by real miracles.

"Heart of Jesus, have pity on us! Most holy Providence of God, provide for us!" This is our grateful hymn and trusting supplication that every day - especially in our present circumstances - should be raised in the name and spirit of Father Guanella, our father. It is our duty to take care of the financial and spiritual life of our Houses in a spirit of poverty, innocence of heart, and hard work. It is our duty to promote our advancement in virtue and religious observance. It is our duty to keep our soul attentive to the calls of our Lord, to discern new ways of spreading charity, and to open new ministries. It is our pledge and duty to remember and follow the indications that Father Guanella had given us on Divine Providence, indications that I have pointed out once again in this essay.

In the Congregation and for the Congregation

I would like to mention once again a very important admonition of the Founder: *"It is necessary to trust in Divine Providence and in the future of the Institute. At times we face difficulty because we have little faith."*

I wish that all my confreres, on this 25th anniversary of his glorious death, would kneel in spirit with me before his blessed tomb and devoutly profess their firm faith in the future of our Institute, the Institute that was his before being ours. I wish that this faith may generate in us the determination to bring to the Institute all our energies, all our knowledge and understanding of the Guanellian spirit in its entirety. May our faith be rich in prayer and sacrifice! For our great fortune, the Institute had welcomed us. This is the Institute that Father Louis had established at the price of great hardships and numberless labors. This is the Institute that comes from his heart super-abundant in love. Let us express our faith by repeating the prayer imprinted on the tomb of the Founder: *"God of hosts, turn again, we implore, look down from heaven and see. Visit this vine and protect it, the vine your right hand has planted!"*

Our Congregation has a future because it was born from the soul of our holy Founder. It was foreseen through inspirations, visions and supernatural promptings he had received. Little by little our Congregation grew up in his heart; it took shape at the cost of great suffering; it was approved by the Church and blessed by people for its providential and much

needed works of mercy. How moved Father Louis was when he was recalling the whole process of foundation!

The Institute is a human institution because entrusted to human beings. Therefore, it is not perfect like the Church of God. If its existence is under attack from decadence and death, the cause should be found not on external adversities, to financial crisis of world economy, nor to religious persecutions. Usually when institutions are tested by God they get stronger! No, the cause of our death will be our sin and negligence, our deficient Guanellian spirit and unsatisfactory ministry in the eyes of God.

Just by entertaining doubts or, worse, showing mistrust in the vitality and future of our Institute, we are insulting our dear and unforgettable Founder who, along with a great inheritance of foundations - which cost him dearly, - has left us a rich patrimony of directives and maxims to learn and to practice. Doubting and lacking trust would disincline Providence towards us, the very same Providence that, since the departure of our Father, had made for us, out of our own merit, true miracles in regard to financial matters and the character of the Congregation.

Our lack of trust means weakening the spirit of the Institute. It means to betray those under our care who are expecting from us consolation, encouragement, inspiration, and enthusiasm, so much the more if we are aware of their deficiencies and insufficiencies.

It is a selfish withdrawing from what we are supposed to do as religious: to promote a greater diligence in our prayer life, in our love of suffering, in our detachment from the world, and from our own self.

What we are supposed to do is to improve our moral character and personal behavior, to promote the exemplary deportment required from Catholic priests and religious, to faithfully observe of the Rule, and to carry out one's own duties, in an untiring and diligent way.

The Congregation belongs to us

The Congregation, to which the Lord had called us to join, is the Congregation to which we belong now. In the Institute we have the opportunity to spend our life in a more profitable way; to receive abundant divine graces otherwise unavailable; to reach our sanctification; to save ourselves. The Congregation had welcomed us and had given us the spiritual bread for our soul and the material bread for our body.

We must love our Congregation. We must love it more than any other Religious Family that might be more glorious than ours, because she is our beloved mother.

She will receive esteem and honor because of our virtues. She will be strengthened by our works of charity. She will grow by new vocations that we have to seek and educate. It is up to us to remain faithful to her, in spite of the inevitable difficulties inherent to religious life, to community life, or just to our life here on earth.

Fidelity should be much more needed in an Institute like ours that shows the deficiencies and hardships belonging to a Congregation still at its beginning. This can be a reason for us to humble ourselves and to accept suffering in our body.

Let us recall the four words beginning with 'F': *fame, freddo, fumo, fastidi* famine, frost, fumes and fuss. We should keep in mind that we religious are followers and imitators of Jesus Christ who had suffered humiliations and privations. We should remember that we are sons of a Church that is blameless and holy though persecuted, despised and insulted like her Head.

Religious virtues: motivation and practice

The backbone of a Religious Community, of a Congregation is the vow of obedience. Through Religious obedience a religious puts at the disposal of Superiors his mind and body, his will and energy for the present and future apostolate. Through their profession, religious give to God the gift of themselves; a small gift but a worthy gift. A joyful submission to God is legitimate, noble, holy, and meritorious. It is public because we put our faith in Superiors. Religious obedience is ridiculed and disregarded only by a world that with licentiousness and rebellion, with despotism and constraint, with violence and force oppresses the capability to think rightly and makes men's will a slave.

Obedience will bring benefit to the soul, and will satisfy the heart only when it involves mind and will. It is necessary that obedience should not be forced. Obedience (and its merits) should not be disregarded because of criticism, malicious interpretations, disappointments, or even useless grumbling. The latter could happen for instance when Superiors embitter us by disregarding the credit we deserve, or demoting us to an inferior role

while the previous one was more prestigious. How sterile our Houses will be if we work for a mere human esteem! We are no more worldly men!

God has to be served with generosity and joy, even at the price of difficulties and uneasiness. We should consider ourselves fortunate if the Lord, for the glory of his name and the salvation of souls, gives us the opportunity to serve Him in the roles and tasks assigned by obedience. It is a small way we might have to repay his goodness and mercy. Those roles and tasks should be accepted with joyful promptness and carried out with greater diligence.

A religious, who does not obey and carries out God's august and loving will, is missing the precious occasion of enriching himself with merits and acquiring the favor of *God*. He does not seem to be intelligent, grateful, and insightful at all when, after the Superior took into consideration his objections, he insists on holding that the obedience is impossible or... too exceptional!

The roles proposed and offered by the Superiors are truly meritorious, because the Lord rewards religious who accept to carry them out as His divine will, while He turns away from those who pick and choose the roles at their will. Once we religious have presented to the Superiors our objections, we should consider the obedience, that we had received, under the light of faith. Otherwise we easily fall into the temptation to bluntly refuse it, or to avoid it by persistently requesting a change or by using shameful subterfuges in order not to carry it out.

The obedience of holding some roles is to be considered a noble service given to the Lord who is asking us to do His divine will. At the same time it is a service given with all our heart to the Congregation, because we are debtors to her for the many favors and expensive services that she provides for us.

Serving in humility and joy

Since I have written on service, I would like to point out that to serve God is to reign. We go by the name of Servants of Charity. Even the name, under which our candidates are ordained, makes reference to the service of the Congregation which takes care of their needs and something more. I must add that every Servant of Charity should be happy to use his abilities and talents (endowed with or to be acquired) for the greater good of the Institute.

A Servant of Charity, then, should anticipate the desire of the Superior, or at least fulfill his requests even by embracing sacrifice. A confrere should never refuse to obey when Superiors ask him to earn all those master degrees necessary for our ministry in the fields of health care, farm culture, teaching, or special education. Father Guanella himself recommended it. Degrees are useful, if not necessary, for the progress of the Houses and for a better competence in running them, besides being a valid occasion for a greater well-being of the residents. If a confrere refuses to attend school he better set forth good reasons!

A blunt disobedience or a half-hearted obedience is saying no to the good Lord. They bring to a religious real harm and dissatisfaction. They display two sad inheritances from our poor human nature born into original sin: (1) spiritual pride that shuns dependence, and (2) concupiscence of the flesh that wants to avoid at all cost discomfort, hardship and suffering. Humility is the remedy for taming our pride and for withdrawing from the deviations into which it leads us. The remedy in punishing our concupiscence is to face precisely the detachment and discomfort of obedience. "*I was always afraid of the spirit of insubordination,*" Father Louis said.

Let the youngest members of the Servants of Charity reflect: Father Louis had said and says to them today, that their religious state is really a privileged one in the sight of men and God. First of all they do not possess riches. And that is good because in the world riches are causing the ruin of many souls and lead people to sin. Riches are the ones that give no real joy and true peace to any heart.

Yet, they the young confreres - have always the security of a safe and hospitable roof over their heads, poor but sufficient clothing, plenty of bread, care and fraternal charity that the Congregation offers them in love. Along with that, there is the advantage of living a life of poverty and obedience, of prayer and of being far away from the dangers of the world. That makes them resemble more and more our Lord, poor and obedient, and leads them to Paradise. They walk here below with the Lord in their heart, and hand in hand with their beloved spiritual brothers. Their ministry of charity, though modest and tiring because of their attending school, is no less precious, because it is highly advantageous to the Congregation; because it is done for the love of God, who generously gives them his recompense; and because it receives the gratitude of the poor.

The older confreres should not pride themselves on or take advantage of their superior status which does not mean any greater merit.

Because of the greater gifts that they had received from God and because of the greater responsibilities they carry out, they have to live a more exemplary life, and discharge their mission in a more intense and humble way.

They have reached the Altar (priesthood) not because of their merit (though some of you had reached it after hard-working years), but only because of the entirely gratuitous goodness and mercy of the Lord. They should now ascend the Altar in a pious, fervent, humble way. They should offer themselves in union with Jesus Christ in a constant immolation for souls. They should find delight in spiritual things, and strengthen their soul through holy graces and supernatural joys. Priests should not take advantage of their office by a sacrilegious and ungrateful abuse that brings them to shun a life of humble and untiring work, and to refuse a more perfect dependence to obedience. They are altering and profaning that call and symbol of obedience and suffering that the Altar is. They are changing their priesthood into an affirmation and justification of a lazy life, into a proud independence, and into following the false precepts of the world.

There are Servants of Charity, fortunately, who desire to please God and to obtain from Him numerous and precious graces and consolations. To please God, they commit themselves to practice even rules or dispositions from Superiors that are of secondary importance. They show in their regard zeal and exactness that are perceived too excessive by other confreres who undervalue and despise rules. These confreres are irresponsible! These confreres have sold themselves to the spirit of the world!

Observing rules and dispositions is instead easy and a source of merits. For instance, what does it cost to wear habitually the religious habit requested by the Rule? What does it cost to carry out the periodical meetings in which the community discusses moral or other issues? What does it cost to hold the periodic formation meetings with newly ordained priests or community? What does it cost to conduct frequent House Council meetings?

Blessed are those Servants of Charity who almost anticipate commands and desires of their Superiors; who second and act with promptness upon their directives. Blessed are they because they trample on their pride and repress the spirit of contradiction. Blessed are they because they seek their own spiritual perfection and the spiritual edification of their confreres.

Franciscan poverty

To Religious, riches had been and always are a cause of laxity and decadence. This is true especially for our Institute that was born for the poor. For the poor it exists. We should be greatly generous in answering their needs while we should disregard ours. Our Congregation is supported by the alms given to the poor. We had received from the Founder the command to embrace the kind of poverty that is carried out by the Capuchin Fathers. Father Guanella stressed that it is a poverty that loves order and cleanness, propriety of dress and living quarters that respect the demands of hygiene and of our times. Poverty is exceptionally important. We must watch over it by avoiding two main dangers. (1) We should avoid the accumulation of savings and donations at the expense of a fair treatment of our residents, and at the expense of covering necessary expenses and possible expansions of the House. (2) We should avoid waste of any kind, and even an unrestricted consumption of goods due either to a negligent administration or to excessive personal expenses that are inappropriate for our religious profession. They are unjustifiable even when the House enjoys a good financial situation.

On the contrary, every confrere should hold dear the virtue of poverty. They are morally bound, by the vow of poverty and by their spiritual advance in perfection, to personally experience the mortifications of Our Lord and the straitened circumstances of the poor. A Servant of Charity observes the vow by obeying the canonical prescriptions and prohibitions, by filling out the requested financial reports, and by abiding to all the requirements of a necessary dependence to Superiors and Rule. He observes also the vow by examining himself in this area, by cultivating the spirit of poverty, by keeping in good condition what belongs to the House, and by using properly what the House had entrusted to him. Moreover, he cultivates the spirit of poverty by avoiding costly means of transportation and unnecessary traveling, excessive purchasing or unnecessary expenses that bring great harm to our fraternal community life. These abuses are often noticed among religious and reproved by diocesan clergy and even by lay people. Sometimes remonstrations arrive from the same benefactors who contribute to the House out of their means at the price of personal savings and sacrifices.

A confrere should not act like that, not even when he spends donations received for personal use or coming from his own estate. He should practice instead the spirit of poverty by avoiding any material

possession that would create disparity among confreres, like keeping for himself gifts, books, clothing, furniture, any kind of tools, office tools ... that cannot be taken away from the House.

Spirit of charity, spirit of sacrifice, mutual edification, and prayer-life will profit by the spirit of poverty that will call upon our Houses larger financial contributions and, more importantly, larger blessings from the Lord.

Genuine and guarded chastity

Chastity is the gem of religious life, the splendor of souls. Oh, with what great words Father Louis, our father, had addressed chastity in his talks and writings! He possessed a virginal soul that was filled with the mercy of the Divine Heart, the Heart that bends over human miseries and draws from them tears of repentance and heroic reparation!

The Sacred Heart of Jesus finds his delight among the lilies. He is living in the Eucharist, the sacrament that germinates virgins. Let us pray to Jesus for a more splendid conformity to his Heart of our priests and religious; for the heavenly beauty and fruitfulness of an immaculate life and ministry; for the protection of the virtue and purity of those souls that the Lord entrusted to us to preserve or to bring to conversion.

Let us pray to Mary, our pure and tender Mother, the Mother of purity and beautiful love. Let us pray to the Saints who had led a life of innocence and penance for the great invaluable gift of purity. To our constant prayer we should add the necessary vigilance over our mind, heart, and senses. We should practice mortification and temperance in foods and sleep. We should practice an appropriate amount of corporal penance, in order to safeguard the treasure of our chastity that is all the time under attack.

Let every confrere follow with diligence and rigor the serious obligations of observing the prescriptions, prohibitions, norms, precautions contained in the Rule. Superiors should make sure that their observance is carried out faithfully. Disregard and negligence in this matter had been and can be the unflinching cause of deplorable moral shipwrecks, of bad reputation, and scandal that affects one's own soul and the souls of many other innocent people.

Essential means: Prayer and Suffering

Christian mortification is an indispensable means to preserve chastity, an explicit manifestation of our opposition toward a world of sensual pleasures and vain enjoyments. It is a form of genuine imitation of Our Lord, who subjected the supernatural fruitfulness of good-works to suffering. Christian mortification was in time past well known and widely practiced by our virtuous and sound people. Father Louis praised it when speaking of the days of his youth. This is a principle of moral and spiritual life that we cannot disregard. There are examples and words that our Founder has summed up for us, writing with his somberness: "*Miserable is the man who is not guided by the spirit of mortification! More miserable is the religious who does not know how to grow in his sanctification by means of the spirit of penance!*" He had summarized his belief in the motto: "*Prayer and suffering!*"

We might be frightened by extreme instances of penance that we have read in the lives of some Saints, especially of those who were called to follow a special vocation. We could admire them, but never practice them. Yet, we cannot criticize or ridicule them as the world does.

While in some circumstances these can be useful and be even suggested, it is prudent not to adopt them without the judgment and the consent of the Confessor or the Superior. There are many other more feasible corporal penances we could choose from, if we want to!

On the other hand there are different forms of mortification of the senses that are not strictly obligatory. These are referred to with the gracious name of "*fioretti*" (*little flowers = free acts of mortification*) and ever since they are used as a precious aid to reach a virtuous life. They are especially suggested to young people who want to grow in their Christian faith and piety. All of us are accustomed to perform this kind of penance since childhood. We should be careful to preserve their beauty and value, to perform them in freedom and in the secret of our heart. Let us appreciate their usefulness and need. Let us cultivate them and practice them. Let us avail ourselves of those occasions of mortification and penance that often are connected to good manners, to a correct interpersonal demeanor in church or community life, to receiving a profitable advantage in financial matters, and even to following the good rules of hygiene. Let us be careful of not falling into the pit of world's foolishness that allures our miserable body to embrace any curiosity and satisfaction of the senses even though the situations we are involved with are not condemned by the law of God.

Because we possess the indispensable spirit of mortification, we would be able to carry out with great edification the penances established by the Church for all the faithful, unless a valid healthy reason might forbid it. We have to be faithful to our strict fasting on Friday. Father Louis insisted upon it since his first draft of the Rule. It should be practiced in every House, except in case of sickness or real indisposition. If a confrere is a missionary in South America he can eat meat on Friday when he cannot provide anything else. It should be, however, for a limited time and not an indefinite concession.

Confreres will practice mortification of gluttony in those ways that are available to them and compatible with their poor health. The practice of this mortification was called the a-b-c of perfection. Father Louis showed no interest at all in the pleasures of food, except when he talked about food needed for those who were sick. Father Louis was totally uninterested in "*the culinary art*" since his young days, even calling it "*worthy of contempt!*"

In our 1910 Regulations he made an exception: on the days of First Professions "*it is permitted that at table a sensible sign of common rejoicing may be added, and that one or more confreres share expressions of festivity and congratulations*".

According to the times and needs of souls, the members of the Congregation should practice that exhausting spiritual and material labor that the Constitutions are pointing out as a characteristic form of penance left us by our Founder.

Confreres should practice penance according to the demands of their ministry that is carried out within a life of obedience and community life. Healthy and providential forms of penance could be for instance ailments, sicknesses and medical diets; the punctual attendance at morning prayer and community meditation; the fatigue of carrying out the daily assignment of manual work, teaching, priestly ministry, or child care; being content with the common food without complaining, or requesting a special treatment that is not justified by sickness or poor health. There are many other forms of mortification that we might easily practice according to our own will, need or inspiration.

The practice of perfection especially charity - frequently offers the opportunity to mortify spirit, body and senses. Think about the bitterness caused by rejections, humiliations, disappointments that seem an inevitable part of life. Think about discipline and dependence; the shame of personal defects; the patient correction of a difficult temper. Even a desire for a

spiritual union of soul from a confrere or the manifestations of fraternal charity in community life could be a way of mortification. It could be a penance because it comes from someone that holds a temperament different than mine, or even because the confrere comes from another part of the country or another country!

More often it is the constant control of our tongue that requires a lot of mortification, as the Holy Spirit warns us: harsh and bitter words; words of anger; words filled with insult and contempt; words of dissent; words that bring one down; words of slander and division; imprudent words whose effect on people we do not sufficiently calculate; coarse or impolite or disrespectful words that are unbecoming in the mouths of consecrated people and educators; useless words pronounced without any reason in the house of God, or during prayer-time, brief though they may be.

Always in the spirit of the Founder

The Institute will prosper when confreres will read, follow, preserve and transmit the Guanellian spirit given by the holy Founder. Father Guanella transmits his spirit through his talks and writings. Though they are not many, they are enough and precious. As I said before, they could be found in the 1907 *Constitutions*, in the beautiful 1910 *Regulations* and scattered in his many books. I had collected them in part in his biography.

Many maxims could be collected and used for formation in the Houses of formation. Father Louis' spirit could be helpful in every virtuous act; in charitable deeds; in financial matters; in trusting in the Providence of God; in the use of mass media; in our prayer life; in discipline; in the education of youth. His spirit has been recalled before; it is recalled once again in this essay; and will be recalled in the future especially in our bulletin *Charitas*.

Absorbing his spirit: a vital urgency

Over the venerated tomb of our unforgettable Father, on this jubilee celebration of a life completed here on earth, but continuing anew in heaven, I have to tell myself and my confreres especially those who joined the Founder early on that we have the obligation to read, practice and spread the spirit of Father Guanella. This spirit must be visible in all his Houses. It must

inspire every activity and word of ours. It must be impressed in the mind and heart of all present and future members of the Congregation in perfect union with the Superior General through their active collaboration in words and deeds.

On his part, the Superior General is aware that it is his duty to care for the financial and moral interests of the Congregation, its activities, organization and discipline; to strengthen and increase its vitality; to fortify every House and every confrere in the genuine spirit of the Institute.

The specific task of the Houses of formation is to pass on to candidates the soul and the ministry of the Founder and of his Institute; his true and integral spirit; an intense love for the Institute, and a strong desire for perfection. The two existing houses of formation should support those others that will be opened in the future both here in Europe as well as in South America.

This very important task must be carried out especially in the novitiate through conferences; catechism classes; talks on the preventive method; care for the sick that could be practiced in a nursing home annexed to the novitiate itself (to be open soon) or among infirm confreres in a future retirement home.

The knowledge and practice of this spirit should also be fostered through the presence of Superiors irreproachable in their religious life; through a good spiritual direction; through a perfect discipline of the House and its management.

Confreres of all Houses should take up that commitment, if they truly love the Congregation and want to receive the blessings of the Founder. There are requests for new foundations, especially in South America. I strongly recommend looking for new vocations for the Congregation. Let us write on this subject constantly in our periodicals. Let the aspirants and postulants be more cared for and guided in the Houses where they have been assigned.

The Houses should be diligent and punctual in making their financial contributions to the General House in order to offset partially the great expenses demanded by supporting financially our candidates. Likewise, it should be done in those Houses where good lay Brothers and professed seminarians reside. Being they in need of more care, moral assistance, charity, spiritual direction, good example, edifying interpersonal relations, and a better formation, they should be entrusted to the particular care of specific confreres. We should not forget, however, that all the

members of the House are involved in their formation by bearing good witness to religious life.

Every confrere has the moral duty to profess the integrity of the Catholic faith of himself and his charges. He should promote among young people an adequate Catholic formation by means of readings, conferences, and instructions. He should be careful not to fall into a dangerous familiarity with books that are doctrinally unsound or morally harmful.

Confreres should avoid reading, even privately, non-Catholic printed matters. They should keep in mind that, besides being harmful by itself, it would be forbidden because of bad example. The authoritative advice of the Shepherds of the Church is exhorting the faithful to be aware that by being in constant contact with those readings, without even knowing it, they might damage the purity of their Catholic faith and their *sentire cum Ecclesia*, to feel with the Church, their being rooted in the Church's faith.

Every confrere should cultivate a true love for the Church, by getting himself interested in her trials, sorrows, triumphs and events in the world. He should also cultivate a filial- affectionate-tender devotion to the Holy Father, always speaking of him with respect and veneration, besides reading and spreading his documents. It will be proper to hold annually some kind of celebration for the Holy Father by special prayers and academic entertainment, especially in the Houses of formation. That is the practice, mind, and spirit of Father Louis Guanella.

Practice, thought and spirit of Father Guanella

Preventive education

The preventive method of education (*note: process of training and developing the knowledge, mind, moral character of a person*) finds inspiration in the Gospel, explanation in human psychology, and validity in experience. Father Louis Guanella wanted this system in his Houses; he practiced it himself, and gave it to us as his own approach to education. His natural inclination to goodness and charity brought him to embrace that system. He knew the needs of the human heart from the deplorable results brought forth by an education of rigor and repression that he himself had experienced firsthand. From the school and support of Father Bosco he was confirmed in this system. In fact, Father Guanella always suggested reading the publications of Father Bosco and of his sons, the Salesians. For example, “The Educator's Help” by Maccone was recommended by Father Guanella himself and by me on various occasions along with other writings. Fortunately, the Founder had left us his advice and guidelines on this method, although not very abundant or developed, but still sufficient for our purpose.

The preventive method is built on a family-like style that resembles the one that characterized the Holy Family of Nazareth. Every Guanellian House should apply it. It must be soaked in charity, harmony, familiarity between Superiors and subjects. An uninterrupted vigilance in all places and hours would help the educator to avoid that his charges may do wrong things. The method does not work for those educators who prefer to spy on their charges in order to catch them falling into some faults and then punish them.

The Superior is the guardian angel of the House. He himself should apply this method, and through the vigilant cooperation of all his collaborators, he will prevent any disorder that could happen in the House.

The preventive method includes solicitude to forming children to sound ideas and habits, to Catholic values, to knowledge of their faith, to a sound piety through sacred functions beautifully done, to the frequent reception of the Holy Sacraments.

The preventive method absolutely prohibits the following: withdrawing the necessary food from those entrusted to us, to spank them, to deny physical exercise, to deliver long and painful punishments, to deliver bitter, contemptuous, and humiliating words, and the use of epithets. If not, we might endanger the physical and psychological health or discourage and embitter those entrusted to our care.

It is not necessary to deliver big punishments. Discipline can use very simple tricks to show firmness. In certain cases and certain individuals, however, it should be inflexible and severe, but always in a persuasive and medicinal way. Authority must be used with extraordinary caution. The subject should experience that you love him and that you do not act out of anger; that you show your firmness because you want to improve him, encourage him to be better.

The preventive method gives preference to the use of individual correction done in charity; to allow what is licit; to say yes or no at the proper time; to give incentives, rewards, and legitimate satisfactions, like singing practice, music activities, walks, movies, talks and familiar conversations. It promotes physical exercise and active games; and finally it helps to guard one's heart against sympathies and antipathies.

It is inconceivable that a Servant of Charity can act in his ministry as if completely unaware of this Guanellian system. It has to be followed because this is the will of our Founder. It must be taught in theory and in practice, especially in the Houses of formation. In every House it must be inculcated and practiced by the Superiors.

It is inadmissible that a confrere could say that theory is one thing and practice is another story, as if theory could not be put into practice! On the contrary, it is possible! What is needed is a constant attention to the needs of the subjects and a constant self-control of ourselves. Whoever maintains that the preventive method is useless, it is because they simply dislike working hard.

Guanellian prayer

Father Guanella was man of prayer. Among us he was the most beautiful example of intense and fervent prayer that he raised to heaven for his spiritual needs and for his foundations. He talked about it extensively, and his teaching is summarized in the motto, "prayer and suffering".

How much he prayed during his endless traveling! Is it a surprise? It should not be. Like every holy Christian, every fervent priest, every active and fruitful apostle, Father Louis had prayed a lot, had prayed always, had prayed everywhere, and had prayed well.

Because a sincere piety is the life and joy of the spirit, we must and can communicate it from our words and deeds. Father Louis was a natural in living Christian virtues. He pictured himself when he wrote:

"The character or distinguishing moral mark of the Servant of Charity must be a very charitable approach to people, an unassuming deportment, a simple way of conversing, within and out of the House."

"A heart that wishes to be pleasant to its neighbor, should show itself, - in everything and to the limit of sin, well-mannered, self-possessed, obliging, rich of that liberty of spirit which is a real gift from heaven."

"We must punish our eyes without any posturing. We must punish our ears without being and appearing unsociable. We must punish our taste because in this consists the beginning of Christian perfection."

Father Guanella portrays the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence - since their beginning - as he desired them to be. *"They are happy but not unmannerly; affable in talking but not talkative; at ease but not proud; modest but not awkward; clean in dress but not meticulous. They are accustomed to move with equal tranquility of spirit from manual work to prayer, from one work to another, and to carry out their pious exercises under grace's inspiration and the merit of obedience."* That is another useful example that might help to be more acquainted with his spirit.

His piety was in conformity with his own personality. It was absolutely free from every affectation and ostentation. It was an edifying and moving revelation of his spiritual fervor and recollection, his burning love for God, his faith, his ongoing conversation with his Lord in whom he put all his trust.

Our piety, our way of praying should not be forced and modeled after exterior postures that could be imposed by circumstances or people. On the contrary, our piety has to be simple and unassuming. Our lively faith in the august presence of the Lord and in His loving mercy should be made visible by how recollected we are. When celebrating public religious ceremonies let us take good care that all the beautiful and suggestive liturgical ceremonies, rites, formulas, and gestures established by the Holy Church are observed. The liturgy is the august and devout "good manners" that sinful creatures ought to practice in front of their Creator and Lord.

When we, individually or as a community, pray in private, - even if it is just one *Hail Mary*, - our eyes should be recollected and not wandering around; we should not talk without reason; we should avoid any indecorous behavior that is not in harmony with the nature and the purpose of prayer. As a matter of fact, we ourselves are the first to intervene when we might see one of our charges doing something like that. They are less culpable because of their status or age. We are guiltier than them because we are religious and priests.

Piety finds its inspiration in the Holy Eucharist, the sun of the earth, the life and presence of God among us. Father Guanella by word and deeds wanted his disciples to form themselves according to this belief. He advised his religious to take advantage of the Eucharistic confraternities providentially instituted by Saint Julian Eymard both for priests and laity.

Thus, God Himself and the faithful would appreciate what we do: allowing our residents to receive the Eucharist when still very young; frequent Communion in our Houses; accurate and fervent celebration of Holy Masses (which has to be taught to the newly ordained); time spent in preparation for Holy Mass; exemplary thanksgiving after Mass; Masses that are devoutly attended; private and public adorations; devout praying of the psalms; daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament; frequent short visits to Jesus in the Tabernacle; evening Eucharistic Benediction that prepares the residents of the House for a peaceful rest for that night and for that... of eternity.

The Superior

Every House of the Congregations should be according to Father Louis a new House of Nazareth, a House of God. A House is blessed because of zeal in the holy work of charity; because of a sound emulation in doing good; of practicing virtuous life, mutual patience, and brotherly fellowship. Every Guanellian House has to be a dwelling place of faith, grace, and charity.

The Superior is at the head of the House like a humble, devoted, vigilant assiduous father always present in his office. He is the guardian of the Guanellian spirit by leading an exemplary life, and observing the Rule that he will kindly and firmly enforce. He will encourage any good activity and initiative. He should keep the Superior General, orally or by writing, informed of difficulties, needs, events and life of the House.

The Superior General's interaction with the Houses cannot be limited only to grave interventions of his authority that, usually, are very rare, anyway! But he has to supervise the improvement and development of the Houses, and to promote their disciplinary and spiritual improvement.

The local superior should hold a meeting with his councilors every month. He should inform them and consult them on finances, the life of the House, its needs, difficulties and abuses. He should spend time with all confreres to animate them in their religious life, to correct their defects, to know their needs. Among them, he should avoid evil talk, malicious

criticism on dispositions received from higher superiors, frivolous curiosity, and disclosure of real or imaginary secrets.

His duty is to cultivate love toward the House, interest toward its development, knowledge of useful news on the Houses (celebrations, recreational activities, infirm confreres...). He has to be vigilant on the moral and Christian life of his subjects; to be sure that everyone in the House gives his precious cooperation; to energetically fight blasphemy, dirty talking, evil readings, and scandals that are the ruin of souls and the curse of a House.

Regarding piety, school and religious instruction, the local superior should make sure that catechism is taught to everyone in the House (children, elderly, religious) making use of those aids that modern teaching might offer. In addition to the customary preaching in church a preaching appropriate to the audience the superior should keep or reintroduce the practice of delivering those informal chats before the night-sleep that were well-practiced by the Founder himself when saying “good-night” to the youngsters in the House. The content could be drawn from what happened during the day, from missionary stories, from the lives of Saints, from events of the Church, from Catholic publications.

A superior should give the opportunity to all to receive frequently and easily the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion; to check that the different Catholic associations be efficient (Apostleship of Prayer, Pious Union of St. Joseph, Altar Servers...) and that the adults join the Catholic Action Association.

Initiatives for promoting reading and studies

It is commendable to keep open a small library in every House. Small school libraries are easy to use since they are already equipped with school oriented books, lives of saints, missionary stories, and good novels. Among the elderly who love to read we should ban all bad books and magazines, and replace them with good ones. For young students attending vocational schools, besides giving them the opportunity of practicing sports and physical exercise, the House should also offer reading material, morally sound and appropriate to their age, along with good books dealing with missionary adventures and formative Catholic issues.

Each House should be equipped of a library that would offer books on Church matters (*Theology, Scripture, Canon Law, Morals,*

Catechesis...) and on different other subjects. This would be very helpful for expanding the cultural richness of the confreres and for exchanging volumes among the different religious communities. Of course, books that are expressively forbidden by their very nature must be excluded.

These libraries should be expanded little by little by adding new books received as gifts or purposely purchased for consultation, study and reading. In charge of them should be appointed prudent confreres (especially in the novitiate) who will distribute them to priests, Brothers, and professed seminarians. The room should be faithfully locked with a key held only by the confrere in charge. What I previously stated regarding obedience should be followed. No book has to be taken out of the House. The books that are lent must be recorded and given back after a reasonable time dedicated to consultation or reading. A book must be returned always before the transfer of the confrere, at the end of every school year or after a prolonged series of preaching.

Let every House have available for the confreres a few magazines on Catholic culture, daily Catholic newspapers, ecclesiastical and pontifical documents, which can be useful along with the Diocesan magazine and other resources for pastoral ministry that Father Guanella and our Rule recommend.

Let us nourish our religious Brothers with good spiritual food, catechism classes, conferences, spiritual reading, lives of the saints, ascetic writings, common prayer, and community fraternal life. They should often read the books of Father Guanella, especially "*The Foundation*", and good catechetical material.

The Prefect of Students (*dean of formation*) should be vigilant with the professed seminarians to see if they are sincere and diligent at school and in their charitable ministry among the youngsters. During their final year of Theology, they should receive some preaching assignment and spiritual ministry among the sick. Annual retreats should be fostered and done in common. School programs should be carried out in their entirety. Remember that theological courses are mandatory for those who pursue the priesthood! The Prefect of Students is in charge of the spiritual formation and preparation of the seminarians to the priesthood and to their different ministries - humble or prestigious that they might be - of their future life in the Congregation.

See how and where we can organize our Alumni Association, an organization that already Father Louis had envisioned. It could be difficult, but never impossible.

We should publicize our Institute and Houses as much as possible for two reasons basically: (1) for a financial reason if we want to continue our charitable ministry; (2) for keeping our friends and benefactors informed on what is going on in our Houses. Because they are willing to aid us, let us be in contact with them and treat them as members of our great family. The forms are manifold: the House bulletin; circular letters; collection of food, clothing, or furniture; donation-boxes placed at stores or with families; Bread of St. Anthony; annual calendar; religious items; net of donors; personal visits to individuals who are good prospects for charitable contributions; groups of active cooperators especially in big cities. We need all that and more if we want to build new facilities for our poor.

Father Guanella was very good in organizing groups of supporters and friends, making use of all his beautiful resources of mind and heart. Father Louis was able to attract them to himself through his most exquisite gracefulness and affection, by arousing their enthusiasm in doing good, and by contributing to their eternal salvation... as many other Saints had done before.

The local Superior is the living rule, the model of virtue, and the provider of all good things in his House. He should never be away from the House, except for a real need. For a vivid reminder of his duties, he should read the Constitutions. He should always preside unflinchingly at community prayer and other common practices together with his confreres.

Particular times for the spirit

1. The punctual and regular morning meditation in common. We cannot forget the impressive insistence and frequency of the admonitions that Father Louis delivered on the matter.
2. At least a brief spiritual reading during meals (preferring edifying lives of Saints) besides the regular daily spiritual reading of the classic text of Rodriguez, without excluding some other good book.
3. The short visit to the Blessed Sacrament before or after lunch so dear to Father Louis, without restricting the personal devotion of visiting frequently "our Paradise on earth".
4. The monthly retreat. If we are forced to limit its duration because of inescapable tasks, the monthly retreat should start in the morning with a good meditation, followed by a more fervent celebration of Holy Mass and prayers. Recollection should be maintained with a prolonged pious reading

at meals. Right before noon or right after it we should continue with the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, with a special spiritual reading, and the particular examination of conscience over the whole month (of which I published a few samples in No. 67 of *Charitas*). The retreat could close possibly after going to Confession, with an evening meditation and the recommendation of one's soul.

Conclusion

Dear confreres, I close this essay, which I had desired to tell you regarding the imminent 25th anniversary of the death of our Father. He still lives among us. I close by quoting the canticle of humility and faith in Divine Providence that he wrote in foresight of his approaching death. It might remain with us as part of his last will. He was writing of himself:

"He will close his eyes bidding farewell to earth, to which he has never given his heart. He will say his last "good-bye" to his disciples who will continue much better than he the Institute that he had founded. His charitable foundations, like himself, are the Lord's. Those who possess faith firmly believe that He, who had raised up in the world religious and Houses, will know how to continue them even without him, who is just an atom lost in space. This poor atom every evening recommends to God himself and his Work, so dear to his heart. Then he abandons himself to a very peaceful sleep."

I remember that, when he was close to his final departure, he kept repeating, in the joyous expectation of a reward mixed with the sweet sadness of leaving us here on earth, "Now I go; now I go. Then he added, *In te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in aeternum*, that is, *In You, O Lord, is our hope: and we shall never hope in vain*. Paradise, Paradise! Let us pray and hope. Providence will never, never abandon us."

Under the smiling glance of our Father let us place, O confreres, our holy resolutions on the tomb where his mortal body is resting. By praying and suffering, let us pursue our good journey, with courage and trust, so that one day we may join him in Paradise!

Praised be Jesus Christ!

THE 1910 REGULATIONS: a gift still valid today

(* Note: Quotes are taken from the Opera Omnia English Edition, vol. 2, 1910 Regulations of the Servants of Charity, Broomall, PA, 1993)

Complement to the 1907 Constitutions

It is already 100 years that the *1910 Regulations* which Father Louis Guanella had written for us, Servants of Charity, have been published. They are the “monument” that enshrines his mature experience and spirituality as a Founder. To me, we have the moral obligation to re-possess more deeply the spirit that Father Guanella instilled in them, and to check if our present religious life as Guanellians is according to the original charism. It is Father Guanella himself who presented the Regulations to his religious. He explained to them their real meaning: the Regulations are complementing and explaining the Constitutions that he had presented to the Holy See in 1907 for the approval of the Institute. They were the Constitutions upon which both Founder and confreres made their perpetual profession. *“A mere and simple rule is like a code of law which needs to be studied, explained and interpreted. This is what I intend to do with the Regulations which I present to you. I beg you to accept them willingly and to study and follow them with firm determination.”* (p.4)

After Vatican II, several Church documents had appeared requiring religious Institutes to check their Rules on some principles enacted by the Council for a sound renewal of religious life. In fact, those aspects had enriched our motivations as consecrated persons, gave new impulse to ministry and spiritual perfection, and, finally, they were enshrined into our new Constitutions.

Our new Constitutions were re-written by following the guidelines of the Church. Besides the canonical elements regarding the Institute as a

juridical entity, they contain the spiritual patrimony of the Congregation and its apostolic mission. Therefore, the new Constitutions are a compendium of the spirituality and charism of the Founder, something that was simply unthinkable at the time of the Founder. Today we have the great fortune to possess a true patrimony: all the writings that he published for his two Congregations and now collected in vol. 4 of his *Opera Omnia* in Italian.

Regarding the Institute he wrote in the Regulations: “*Every religious family has its own particular spirit, suggested by the grace of the Lord according to time and place. This character or imprint is the one that distinguishes an Institute from a similar one.*” (p.73)

What he just said concerns also the specific mission (that he calls “*financial character.*” the style of Guanellian life (that he calls “*moral character*”), and the Guanellian spirituality (that he calls “*character in a spiritual and religious order*”).

Significance for the formation of the Servants of Charity

On the second anniversary of the Founder's death, his successor, **Bishop Aurelio Bacciarini**, SdC, wrote a circular letter to the confreres dated October 15, 1917.

“His memory is not fading. On the contrary, as the gap of time between us and his departure is increasing day after day, the more his sweet figure is felt alive and loved. We talk to Father Louis every day... on him we lean as children on their father. Yet, this exchange of love is not enough. It is necessary to imprint in our heart, life, and ministry, his example of life, his maxims, and especially the Regulations into which he instilled the whole of his spirit, a fire than cannot be extinguished.”

At the end of the annual spiritual retreat in the summer 1919, again Bishop Bacciarini addressed his confreres on the same matter. “Last night I finished reading the admirable *1910 Regulations*. These words of Father Guanella impressed me: *The best way for strengthening our Institute is to assimilate our religious spirit and to observe the Rule*. This should be our noble commitment on which to apply with all our mind and energy. The mind of Father Louis is clear like the bright light of the sun. He willed to found a religious Institute, a true religious Congregation in the real sense of the term. All his life bears witness to it; all his meditations had mentioned it over and over; all the Rules that he drafted among the many trials of his foundations would confirm that. His last Regulations are so full of life and

so moving regarding religious life that it seems to me that the more he was getting close to eternity, the more Father Louis was consumed by an interior fire to faithfully translate into words his very soul. I heard learned priests saying, after reading the Regulations: “In their simplicity, in their practicality, in the fire that burns in them, they are a masterpiece of religious life.” Oh, how much we would like to feel the soul of Father Louis and his enthusiasm for religious life! We will treasure this beautiful Rule in which Father Louis instilled his great spirit so vividly. Someone told me that Father Louis did not have the intention to make us religious in the real sense of the word. This is the worst insult we can hurl at Father Louis. It is an insult to what he had always said in clear and unequivocal words! It is an insult to his clear-sightedness since his mind was too intuitive to see that a religious Institute, without the foundations of a religious Institute, looks like the evangelical house built on sand. Please, let no one dare to say what Father Louis had never said!”

Father Leonardo Mazzucchi, SdC, too, mentions frequently the *1910 Regulations* when dealing with the kind of religious formation that Father Guanella himself had envisioned for his priests and brothers.

He says: “Especially in the *1910 Regulations* so precious and dear to our heart Father Guanella willed to describe his ideal Servant of Charity. First of all he never underestimated the ultimate goal of religious life, perfection. And secondly, he never ceased to insist on a substantial interior life that cannot be renounced, and on the exemplary observance of the rule done by hard work and sacrifice. Yet, Father Guanella had to take into consideration the real situation of his disciples, the intellectual, moral and physical abilities they are endowed with. The *1910 Regulations* are written in a very simple comprehensible way and pay attention to the level, the degree that each confrere had reached in his spiritual life. It outlines the path to higher spirituality on which religious ought to stride. In it Father Guanella insists not only to give due priority to interior life rather than to external activity, but also on paying more attention to the observance of the vows and working on them. The vows are presented as a journey progressing into consecutive practical stages: *Poverty* has to be combined with a great trust in Providence; *Chastity* is a special virtue that should be kept unblemished from Baptism (as he had done) or to be firmly preserved if we had violated it; *Obedience* has to be carried out as a great, positive value that shows filial love to God and voluntary generosity of heart. Other practices of mortification are also important and necessary. Talking about the special

atmosphere of piety in which a religious should breathe - if he wants to flourish and to find the necessary resources for his interior progress and external apostolate - Father Guanella used beautiful and understandable words to present prayer life filled with love, the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and making holy meditation more under the flames of affection than speculation!”

In the 1941 reprint of the Regulations, Father Mazzucchi writes: “Unchanged are the words with which, five years before leaving us, our beloved Father presented and offered us the simple yet precious pages of his spiritual and moral Regulations... They preserve and transmit the genuine spirit and the much needed directives of our holy Founder, to which we must unflinching remain faithful out of moral obligation and personal interest. They contain pages which are rich with impressive effectiveness and touching eloquence... Our blessed Constitutions are and will always be for us the unforgotten and never obsolete book worthy of reading. These Regulations stand for the moral and spiritual commentary of the Constitutions, and should be a vital and nourishing food for the activity and spirituality of children who are eager to become worthy of their dear and holy Father... The reading and faithful application of the Regulations should marvelously benefit all of us with personal sanctity and fruitful works, as it was and still is in the mind and heart of our Father. May he bless and assist us until our reunion with him in heaven!”

“The Servant of Charity, who truly cares about his religious perfection and the prosperity of the Institute, should lovingly meditate Constitutions and Regulations with the holy intent of learning the spirit and carrying it out according to his spiritual advancement.” (Father Guanella)

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK AND COMMENTARY

Father Pietro Pasquali, SdC

On the *1910 Regulations* of the Servants of Charity, the late Father Attilio Beria, SdC, expressed this opinion: “There is no doubt that these Regulations are the masterpiece of Father Guanella, Founder-Father-Master. The *1910 Regulations* are truly precious for their charismatic inspiration; for their richness of spiritual doctrine; and for their great acumen in directing religious.” That judgment mirrors almost the one given by Father Leonardo Mazzucchi in his preface to the 1941 edition of the Regulations.

Mazzucchi says that the *1910 Regulations* “preserve and transmit the genuine spirit and the much needed directives of our holy Founder” and contain “pages which are rich with impressive effectiveness and touching eloquence”.

Father Guanella himself announced the publication of the Regulations in the circular letter dated 20 October 1910. “*You will receive the latest Regulations so that you may have secure guidance in becoming Servants of Charity in everything and forever, as the Lord wants, and in the way He will grant you his grace and help.*” (p. 160)

A few months later, on February 25, 1911, he confided to the confreres that he had dedicated less time and energy to their formation compared to the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence. However, he made up for that by the 1907 Constitutions and 1910 Regulations.

In the Regulations “*I intended to lay open my heart so that my confreres may form their heart to the spirit of the Rule... I exhort you to meditate on the maxims that in the Regulations I have written for you, so that you may grow in love with the Lord and with the Institute. May God bless you!*” (p. 161)

1. Prospect within which the 1910 Regulations were born

The *1910 Regulations* of the Servants of Charity were printed in Gatteo (*Romagna Region*) and given to the confreres on Christmas 1910. Repeatedly, Father Mazzucchi testified that Father Guanella wrote and dictated the Regulations non-stop, partly in Gatteo and partly in Como in 1910.

He wrote and dictated. As a matter of fact the manuscript is formed by 253 pages of different size. Father Guanella himself wrote the first 21 pages, the pages regarding the Councillors (215-223), and the concluding ones on the moral obligation of the Rule (241-253). The rest was written from dictation by at least five people. The one that Father Guanella mostly referred to was the professed seminarian and future priest, Santino Busnelli, SdC.

The Founder wrote and dictated the Regulations in 1910, almost 25 years after the first foundation, and five before the end of his holy life. On the one hand, he utilized his more mature spiritual experience and impressive activity; on the other he left to his spiritual disciples clear and precise points of reference for their walk toward sanctity and charity.

*** First observation.**

The text was not composed during a period of time dedicated exclusively to prayer and meditation. *It springs out from the heart and follows the flows of life.* It is a detail that confirms that Father Guanella had reached a great interior equilibrium, sign of a soul constantly under the influence of God's action, while he never ceased to take care of consolidating his two Congregations and to broaden their presence in the world.

In 1910 he went to Rome three times: end of January, beginning of April, and in the beginning of November. Those trips were not short or comfortable. They were also an opportunity to visit on his way the Houses in Veneto, Romagna, Marche and Lazio. Add to them, Sisters and Confreres who approached him constantly regarding directives on community life and ministry, permissions of all kind, and advice, even money for the Houses. A proof is the large correspondence of Father Guanella to his collaborators. Most of them are just short telegraphic letters that give answers to both urgent problems and the day to day running of a House.

I think it may be useful if I give you a short detail of the Houses that in 1910 received Father Guanella's particular attention and care.

- In Vicosoprano (Switzerland) the Congregation was building the Church of St. Gaudenzio that, according to Father Guanella, had cost the House of Divine Providence in Como enormous sacrifices of money, mental stress, and physical presence.

- In the House of Nuova Olonio, already ten years old, many things were going on concerning not only the House itself, but the building of the

church and townhouses. State, Congregation, and House agreed to surround the House with a new town. At the side of the parish church, a bell-tower was taking shape. For the needs of the new town a new water system, a new cemetery, and a new school were on the list.

- In Milan, at St. Ambrose ad Nemus, the House for the Poor (run by the Sisters) was sharing its activity with St. Cajetan House for elderly and youngsters (run by the Servants).

- After the death of the diocesan priest Father Luigi Ghinelli (March 1909), Father Guanella relieved his facility and sent to Gatteo Father Martino Cugnasca, SdC, to take care of the school and the nursing home (both founded by Fr. Ghinelli), to open a printing shop, to publish a newsletter four times a year, to restore the buildings, and to give a better setting to the local small hospital.

- The Sisters were sent to Trecenta, in Veneto, to run a children day care, a vocational school for girls, the Sunday youth center, and later on to open a nursing home.

- Father Guanella landed in Ferentino (not far from Rome) in 1908 to open a House for children and elderly and to take care of the nearby parish.

- The worst headache of the Founder was, however, the church of St. Joseph at Trionfale (Rome) that was under construction. To Father Giovanni Bruschi, SdC, Father Guanella sent a note, saying, "Just the foundations cost sweat of blood." The construction began in 1909 and was dedicated in March 1912.

- The worries for the good start of other Houses (especially in Senigallia) or the consolidation of others were not bothering him excessively.

**** Second Observation.***

For ten years, Father Guanella, though putting all his trust in Divine Providence, was feeling the urgency to give to his two Congregations a final place in the Church through the approval of the Holy See.

Practical reasons were demanding such a step. The two Congregations were already present in different Italian and Swiss dioceses, and it was difficult to be under and to follow the opinions and suggestions of the local bishops. There was thus the real necessity to have an official recognition of both Guanellian charism and religious vocation from the Holy See.

For the fourth time, Father Guanella had forwarded to the Vatican the request for recognition and had the two Constitutions drawn up under the advice and guidance of the Redemptorist Father Claudio Benedetti.

The Daughters of St. Mary of Providence were officially recognized by the Holy See on 27 September 1908 and their Constitutions were approved “ad experimentum” for seven years.

The Servants of Charity had to wait for four more years before being approved.

Under the advice of Father Benedetti, Father Guanella and the first confreres made their perpetual vows on 24 March 1908 on the 1907 Constitutions. Only on 15 August 1912, after many tribulations, the Servants will receive the *decretum laudis*, the first step toward a final approval. It will be the same Decree that will allow the Congregation to request from local bishops the priestly ordination of its confreres on behalf of the same Institute.

Father Mazzucchi wrote: “In 1912 the *decretum laudis* was granted to our Institute. It was truly earned by the prayers and suffering of Father Louis who climbed a long and painful Calvary of anxiety and trials for it.

Between 1907 and 1912, Father Guanella was very busy to put into practice the directives of the Holy See that, among other issues, was requesting better boundaries to the purposes of the Institute, a clear cut distinction between Sisters and Priests, and a more thorough formation of the new members. Bust most of all he was tormented by a nagged thought: the necessity of instilling in the heart of his confreres the true religious spirit in the few years left before death.

Father Mazzucchi bears witness to it: “Once, it was 1911, Father Guanella told me that he felt going on for eight or ten years more. However, several times in 1912 he repeated over and over that he felt tired, old, and close to death; that his desire was to bring to Rome physically and morally all of us and then go.”

Father Guanella, once reached his spiritual maturity in fullness, dedicated the years 1907-1910 to consolidate the two Congregations.

His program was:

1) “*I would like to bring you physically to Rome*”. As a matter of fact:

* in 1903 brought the Servants of Charity to Monte Mario, at the outskirts of Rome;

* in 1904 brought the Sisters first to St. Peter in Montorio and in 1907 to St. Pancratius;

* in 1908 bought the land for the future construction of St. Joseph in Trionfale Church, that was built between 1909 and 1912.

2) “*I would like to bring you morally to Rome*”. I guess that Father Guanella refers to the approval of the Holy See. In fact, the Sisters received theirs in 1908, while the Servants in 1912.

To this already full schedule, Divine Providence, at the end of 1912, added a new and wonderful opportunity to journey to the United States of America. From Rome his Institutes were preparing themselves to spread around the world.

*** Third observation.**

The *1910 Regulations* holds a very significant place among the writings of the Founder for the Congregations. In those years already mentioned, 1907-1915, Father Guanella is totally dedicated to his two Institutes, and for them he publishes Constitutions and Regulations one after another.

The *1910 Regulations* takes the central place within the Founder's spiritual itinerary from which we can see clearer and clearer that Father Guanella is effectively a man of God; a man totally dedicated to the building of the Kingdom of Charity; a man that experiences an intimate union with the Lord; a man that is not afraid of trials and not stopped by any difficulty; a man that entrusts himself to the guidance of Divine Providence like a son; a man that welcomes without reserve into his life the plan of God; a man that wills to pass on that plan to those who God gathers and will gather around his apostolate.

The figure of being a true man of God emerges more distinctively in Father Guanella. It is the reason that, in my opinion, explains the beauty of the *1910 Regulations* and its originality in comparison to those he had written previously in 1899 and 1905.

Father Beria asked Father Mazzucchi once why Father Guanella wrote the *1910 Regulations*. Father Mazzucchi repeated twice: “It is not an easy answer. During his last years of life, Father Guanella had changed. He talked less; he was more lost in his thoughts; his prayer was more absorbed; and he was more detached. I think he was feeling Heaven closer.”

The writing and subsequent publication of the *1910 Regulations* of the Servants of Charity refer to this particular climate, and give an answer to his state of mind that was aggravated by the increasing responsibilities of

his confreres in front of God and Church.

The succession of Constitutions (predominantly juridical in character) and Regulations (predominantly spiritual in character) reveals a fact: Father Guanella was convinced that juridical texts cannot adequately express God's charism; they cannot offer to the Congregations their clear being and description; and they cannot instill in his disciples the final decision that makes them leaping into the works of charity.

Church Law at the beginning of 1900 had made a significant step ahead in comparison to previous centuries. In fact, it had welcomed into Religious Life all those Institutes of Apostolic Life that had multiplied in the 18th century. However, the excessive oppression of the Canon Law was killing the new Congregations, because it was requiring a uniformity that was watering down too much their charismatic identity.

It is for sure - the duty of the Church to “discern” charisms, to verify their authenticity, to value if they correspond to the needs of that particular historical period, to regulate their apostolate, and be guarantor that they serve unity and charity. However, after that discernment, the Church is obliged to respect the inspiration God had given to the Founders/Foundresses, and to safeguard the different charisms, a true richness benefitting the people of God.

Father Guanella, through his many Statutes, Regulations, and Constitutions, manifests his will to submit to the judgment of the Church the charism he had received from the Lord, and to assure the Church of his personal fidelity and the fidelity of his spiritual disciples.

Through his Regulations he wants to transmit to his disciples his genuine spirit and mission assigned by God to his religious families. Spirit and mission must be accepted as their essential characteristic and inalienable inheritance.

2. Meaning of the 1910 Regulations in relation to the Rules and Constitutions

The succession of Rules (*Constitutions*) followed by subsequent Regulations could bring people to think that Regulations are just a mere explanation or an extension of Rules. Not at all! Regulations go beyond juridical norms because they expound the charismatic experience that brings to life the two Guanellian Congregations. Father Guanella seems to bend toward that interpretation when he introduces to his religious the *1910*

Regulations. "A mere and simple rule is like a code of law that needs to be studied, explained and interpreted."

In the preface of the 1911 Regulations of the DSMP, he writes: *"To render the interpretation and the application of the Holy Rule easier, it will be useful to put before you a "Guide", a clear and simple explanation for the particular cases in which you may find yourself during your Religious Life."*

Yet, the 1910 Regulations are more than a mere explanation of the Constitutions. Rather, through them Father Guanella intends to enliven Church Law, to illumine it by the gift (*charism*) received from God. The charism precedes Church Law and is its leaven even when the juridical aspect seems to prevail. We need to find it.

We have the impression that Father Guanella was not too comfortable with the juridical norms that at the time were structuring Religious Life. It was not because he felt ignorant on Canon Law, but because he thought that Canon Law could never fully express both charism and spirituality that were inspiring him from inside.

The Rule according to him *"is teacher of life that we have to listen to and to follow, like a student to his teacher and a son to his father."* (p. 125)

There is therefore, between Rule and religious, something that precedes and goes beyond the canonical norms. Twice he returns in his 1910 Regulations on this idea: *"The Rule is venerable because it flowed from the Heart of Jesus Christ when he preached on the mountain of the Beatitudes... It was sanctified at the foot of the cross in the persons of the sorrowful Mother and of St. John (the first community!)... It was the constant object of care and attention, of love and veneration on the part of the supreme Pontiffs, of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and of the Saints."* (p. 112). The Rule he insists is *"the law of the Ten Commandments"*.

The Rule is perceived as a father and a mother. Therefore it has to possess something that goes beyond human legislation. Only under this light can it be sanctification and guide for the mission. Through the Rule the particular gift of the Holy Spirit (*the charism*) is transmitted to us. For that reason the Founder says that we *"have to learn the spirit of the Rule"*, because the Rule is another source by which the Lord transmits his will to us. The confrere should *"deepen further the knowledge of the spirit of the Institute by meditating upon the events, times and ways that brought them to the foundation of the House of Divine Providence"*. (p. 104)

Our Guanellian charism does not come only from the Rule (*Constitutions*) and Regulations, but also from the life-experience that the Founder went through, from our own individual histories, histories that are

to be read under the light of faith and the interpretation of the Gospel. The Rule is therefore a mediation of God's will that we have to look after beyond the juridical system.

Father Guanella mentions a second mediation. The Holy Spirit asks for obedience of faith through the Rule. The Rule becomes alive and gives life when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a religious is capable of being faithful to it.

Father Guanella writes in 1912: *“There should be no need to point out that you, with your good will and holy intentions, have the duty to bring life into the letter of the Rules so that they can be effective as expected.”* (p. 176)

The *1910 Regulations* should be perceived as a *“teacher and friend”*, as an interpreter of God's plan rather than a code of laws. The Founder says: *“... the Regulations are the detailed extension of the desires of God, our common heavenly Father. Likewise, a religious considers the desires of the superior who governs the Institute in the name of God.”* (p. 60)

For that reason he asks his confreres: *“Know how to meditate on them so that you can love ever more the directions they give you. Their purpose is to sanctify you and the neighbor whom the Lord in his mercy intends to save through you.”* (1899 R vol. 1, p. 145)

“I entrusted to you...the development of the same Rules that are the internal Regulations which, as a master and friend, may accompany you step by step in your life and every ministry of charity.” (1905 R, vol. 1, p. 181)

The Regulations' aim is to help religious to seek the glory of God and the sanctification of souls, and to accompany step by step religious in their journey to a virtuous life. They possess and transmit the spirit of faith, hope and charity. Under this light we can understand better what he writes to the Sisters in their 1911 Regulations. *“Before reading either the holy Rule or this Guide which I now place before you, raise your mind and heart to God.”*

Without disregarding Canon Law, it is evident that Church law finds its value from the plan that God has for his Church; that it reaches its purpose when it truly promotes the good of souls. The law of the Church is always mediation between faith and human life. It has to be rooted in faith and favor life. This applies also to the section of Canon Law that takes into consideration Religious Life (Book II, Part 3, can 573-746).

Father Guanella does not theorize on that affirmation because it will be the fruit of a theological study not yet available to him, a study that will appear many years later. He, however, realizes that Church law is very terse in its statements; it does not give any reason regarding its choices; it does not

specify the goals that it intends to pursue. For that reason, he wills to place the *1910 Regulations* side by side with the 1907 Constitutions that by nature were supposed to be arid and apparently not connected to God's plan.

In the 1911 Regulations to the Sisters we read: “*We walk always with security when we follow the light which comes from on high, keeping our step obedient to the word of the one who has the God-given duty and right to guide us.*”

The Regulations are the light that allows us to see the plan of holiness and charity proper to the Guanellian family. They become the living and faithful word of the Founder, master and father, who at our side continues his mission in the Church and in the world.

The *1910 Regulations'* meaning finds confirmation from other early writings of the Founder that preceded all his normative texts, and by him viewed as the authentic interpretation of his spirituality and heart. I refer to “*Maxims of spirit and method of action*”, a collection of conferences delivered to the Sisters between 1888 and 1889, and in particular to “*The Foundation*”, first published in 1885 in Pianello, and again before his death as his last will to his two Institutes.

Father Piero Pellegrini, SdC, rightly observes, “In 1910 and 1911, with the two last Regulations to the Congregations very similar regarding content and style, Father Guanella returns to the same positions he held at the beginning of his foundation. It is a return to interior guide and formation, though the exterior is not neglected. They look like a synthesis of interior and exterior, a personality completed in body and soul. It is not a mere return to the beginning, but a going over again at a higher level, more mature and true-to-life by the long experience of life accumulated along the years.”

3. Comparison with the 1899 Internal Regulations and the 1905 Regulations

The *1910 Regulations* are notably different from those Father Guanella had written between 1899 and 1905, and not only because of stylistic issues. There is in them a spiritual inspiration that denotes the father and the guide of a family that he is. There is a longing that urges him to pass on a project that gives full meaning to a life of consecration to God and neighbor. In them we can perceive that Father Guanella is not a mere business man that organizes an apostolate, but a friend that accompanies people with a loving and strong heart; a father who is involved in the mission, that the Lord had entrusted to him and to those who follow him as their teacher.

Father Beria writes: “It is evident that among the previous Regulations, the 1910 ones show a great change in their approach, setting, exposition of content, and style. There is in them a penchant toward sanctity and a particular urging to communicate an interior fire. There is present a way of writing that is intolerant of titles, sub-titles and paragraphs; that wants to be free from any obstacles that may prevent a fluent exposition. This text resembles more some books and writings of the beginnings of his foundation, more so than to previous Regulations.”

Oddly enough, in the *1910 Regulations* there is no explicit emphasis on some topics dear to him that had taken a lot of space in previous Regulations, like the bond of charity, the unity of direction, and the preventive method.

The bond of charity is taken into consideration right at the beginning of his foundation in the “Maxims of spirit” (1888-1889). One of its chapters deals with “Bond of union”: “*The Lord draws to himself souls by the virtues of poverty and purity but keeps them united in particular by the bond of Christian charity... Today's communities are supported and bound together by the bond of charity. With this simple and noble bond of love they sanctify themselves and edify others.*”

The 1899 Constitutions introduce the chapter on the vows with the chapter “On the bond of charity”.

The 1899 Regulations treat extensively about the union among superiors and unity of direction. That union begins and ends with the bond of charity.

The 1905 Regulations mentions the topic of unity of direction: “*Unity of direction is a kingdom of peace and charity.*”

The *1910 Regulations* do not talk anymore about bond of charity and unity of direction. That does not mean that their concepts are disregarded. In paragraph 5, part 1, when talking about the members of the Congregation, the Founder presents the body of the Servants of Charity Institute: the superior general together with his council is “*like the head, the eyes, and the ears of the body. The local councils are like the hands and feet with which to operate.*” (p.28)

The body of the Congregation is however interiorly animated by the grace of the Holy Spirit who, “*is like fire in a steam-engine that gives power to cross the sea of life... Consequently, all members must pray that the grace of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit may fill the mind and the soul of the governing members. Superiors, however, must add their own virtue and energy to merit that the fire of the charity of Jesus Christ may enflame them,*

and thereby burn their own defects and frailties, and spread its light and warmth into the heart of Christian society.” (p. 28) A few pages before, Father Guanella reminded the confreres of the communion that must reign among priests and brothers, because both are united by the same faith, same religious vows, same Word of God and Sacraments of the Church.

Talking about the General Chapter (p. 89), he exhorts his confreres: *“Above all they should pray with all their heart so that their own and the heart of their superiors may become one according to the infinite wisdom and bounty of the Heart of the divine Savior.”*

At the end of the *1910 Regulations*, Father Guanella shares his ideas on Rule and describes the Guanellian community with an example already present both in the *Maxims of spirit* and in the *1899 Internal Regulations*: *“The Rule is a way of living in a religious community that brings the members to be one as grains of flour mixed with water in order to form a heap of dough. If a handful of leaven, a bit of divine charity, is added to the dough, the dough is ready to be baked and to become the bread which will be distributed at the table of the great and the lowly, of all men on earth. How precious is religious life for all those who understand its value! How admirable is the bond of charity which unites souls!”* (p. 124)

The bond of charity keeps together religious and residents of the House. *“Superiors should not as far as possible make their authority heavily felt on their subjects. Inferiors must obey out of faith and not out of force, like slaves... To avoid quarrels between superiors and inferiors, it is necessary that charity must be queen.”* (p. 20)

There is continuity in the thought of Father Guanella, almost a golden thread that crosses all his writings. On this subject, all Regulations integrate each other and recall each other.

It is truly a surprise the lack of any mention of the preventive method in the *1910 Regulations*, a method that is recalled in the last writing to the Servants of Charity, the “*Norms*”, published in July 1915: *“Those who are at the head of discipline should use their most conscientious watchfulness over their subjects and should form them according to the preventive system of Don Bosco that could be learned from several manuals written by Salesian priests.”* (*Norms*, vol. 2, p. 140)

And yet in the *1899 Internal Regulations* all section 4 deals with *“The preventive system used in the House”* that later on is taken up in its entirety by the *1905 Regulations*. Why there is no mention in the *1910 Regulations*? Is it because Father Guanella had already talked enough about the matter in previous texts; or because the Founder thought better to aim

more at the spiritual formation of the Servants of Charity? That gap confirms the necessity for us to make reference to previous Guanellian texts even though the *1910 Regulations* surpass them in importance and could be compared to the 1911 Regulations of the Sisters. In 1915 he writes in the “Norms”: “*Previous Regulations should be followed until definite disciplinary regulations will be written taking into account all of them.*”

4. Literary style

The *1910 Regulations* deal with a prose clear like a river that, rich with water, calmly flows through the plains. Only here and there we may find some obstacle due to the Latin style.

a) *The most vibrant pages*

Some pages of the *1910 Regulations* are particularly meaningful. Father Guanella is captured by the topic that he likes and writes with passion, even lyricism. A fitting example could be when he talks about the primary and secondary purpose of the Institute: “*There will be the good Servants of Charity who with faith have helped the poor daily for many years. There will be those good Servants of Charity who during their life never said, 'That's it! It's enough!' in their works of charity and self-sacrifice. Those good Servants of Charity will ascend with Jesus Christ on high, and will possess the kingdom which the Lord in his infinite goodness has prepared for them since the beginning of creation. What a reward! What a triumph!*” (p. 10)

I would like to make a list here of main passages that you may find in Italian in Vol. 4 *Scritti per le Congregazioni*, or in the **English Edition, Vol. 2**.

- Communion among the members of the Institute (page 1246 or page 22)
- Duties of Priests (1247 or 23)
- Purpose of Novitiate and commitment of religious (1270 ff or 44 ff)
- Comparing Baptism and Religious Vows (1274 or 48)
- Praising Chastity (1280 or 54)
- Meditating on the Eucharist (1290 or 63)
- Dealing with Meditation (1294 or 67)
- Fraternal Correction (1314 or 85)

- Comparing the Congregation with the Church and the Church with Paradise (1328 or 100)
- Talking about Rule and Church (1350 or 125)

We truly perceive that Father Guanella doesn't want to teach only, but to involve the reader into the spiritual adventure suggested by the Spirit of the Lord to him. "The reader of the Regulations who follows its progressive refinement in time is moved to constantly compare himself with a profound voice which provokes and challenges to confront himself not with the letter, but with the spirit of the norm. It is a confrontation with the charitable inspiration of Father Guanella who wrote it, and experimented with it on himself and others, turning it into a counsel which is more binding the more it reaches deep into the conscience." (C. Lapucci, *The figure, the thought and the action of Fr. L. Guanella in his writings*, 2005, p. 68)

b) Frequent exemplifiers

Many examples bring vivacity to the topic. It is Father Guanella's style in preaching and the style that he recommended to his priests. The Church is the big house of the Lord; charity is the fire and fire should be the life of a religious. "*The life of a religious can be compared to the fire, which warms up, makes the engine move, melts minerals and liquefies metals. The fire of charity of Jesus Christ gives life to a Christian religious, makes him act with haste in the works of good, gives him strength to inspire his heart and the hearts of others by removing even the greatest difficulties so that he can walk rapidly in the path to perfection.*" (p. 66)

God is like a furnace workman who sits at his chair and blows the bellows to purify and transform the hearts of men. Jesus Christ is the immaculate Lamb and his followers are the sheep. The Saints are the stars of the sky. The Congregation is a body with many members: priests and brothers should fight together the battles of the Lord.

Like Angels and Saints, they sing hymns to God's glory, their communion of life "*is capable of building a tower which cannot be overcome by any attack of the enemy.*" (p. 24)

"*The Institute of the Servants of Charity like a magnet should attract the hearts of new vocations.*" (p. 32)

The postulants of the Servants of Charity should "*appear as an open book which everyone can read clearly and understands the contents.*" (p. 38)

Novices are "*compared to a marble statue which in its rough stage still needs to be refinished by an intelligent artist before becoming worthy of*

being presented in the House of the Lord.” (p. 43)

The chaste heart of a Christian has to be *“fervent with charity like the sun which illumines and warms all created things, even the unclean, without its splendor being stained.”* (p. 54)

A chaste Christian has to be in his faculties and senses like the touch-me-not flower that does not want to be touched. Those who *“never knew anything and know nothing of human miseries”* could be compared to *“certain priceless pearls which are better preserved if kept in their jewel-case than exposed to be seen by all.”* (p. 55)

The Servant of Charity must be a man of prayer. *“He must know how to raise himself to God like a bird rises up in the sky at the sight of any danger...He should learn to moan like a baby dove, and to rise up high like an eagle!”* (p.56)

“The Servants of Charity...are to be compared to little swallows, who cry with piercing screams. They cry above all when their mother comes to place little insects in their mouths...Vocal prayer is like steel which is stricken on flint-stone to develop sparks to light a fire which is good for home and social needs.” (p.67)

When meditating on the Holy Eucharist, *“like the sun which illumines, warms up and makes the earth bring forth fruits* (p.64)”, the Servant of Charity should *“be like the industrious bee which is busy in the petals of flowers sipping in the sweet nectar and converting it into the exquisite honey of piety and devotion.”* (p.69)

“The Servants of Charity should love their House as the bees their hives.” (p.75)

They *“should keep in mind that they must act with candor, like crystal in which is reflected the image of their truth and charity. In this way they will always grow more candid and dear like children.”* (p.74)

“It is with the breath from the lips that material fire is lighted and rekindled, and it is with the spiritual breath of prayer that the fire of zeal and charity is revived.” (p.112)

“Virtuous example is by itself a ceaseless breath of the virtue of the Holy Spirit. Example is like a sun which is light and heat. It makes the flowers grow and ripens the fruits in the spiritual garden of virtue and sanctity.” (p. 113)

“It is as essential to form subordinates according to the spirit and direction of the Institute, as it is to have good leaven in order to bake dough into delicious and nourishing bread.” (p.118)

Father Guanella inquires when a confrere is ready to carry out major

responsibilities. His answer is: “*This will be done when, like a little bird in the nest, the confrere has strengthened his wings and is able to fly.*” (p.118)

“*The receptionist of the House must always be alert as a sentinel at his post, night and day.*” (p.121)

As you have seen, Father Guanella's speech is frequently enlivened by examples and comparisons that keep the message simple and understandable to all, a good way to remember the message itself. This kind of language is quite different from the language of science which is by nature precise, but uninspiring. Father Guanella's way of talking leaves ample room to people to apply what they hear in their own life...

c) *Biblical quotes*

In the *1910 Regulations* Father Guanella uses **several biblical quotations** that were forbidden (1901 decree *Normae secundum quas*) to be inserted in the Constitutions while they were under the process of Church approval. Yet, they are necessary to a Founder for passing on to his religious a truly Christian path to perfection. These quotations come to him so easily that he does not even bother to footnote any reference. They are around sixty, mostly from the Gospels. The ones from the Old Testament (Psalms, Sirach, Proverbs, Wisdom, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Tobit, and Exodus) are more numerous than those from the NT. There are quotations from St. Paul's letters (Corinthians, Ephesians, Thessalonians, Timothy), but especially from the Gospels (21 from Matthew; 6 from Luke; 6 from John). The most cited passage is the Beatitudes (7 times).

The purpose of quotations is not just to embellish the talk. They come from the bottom of his heart in order to render more powerful the subject he is taking into consideration.

We should never forget that the *1910 Regulations* is a child of his time, especially in some theological issues, for instance, the way to understand and present the mystery of the Eucharist and community life.

Regarding Holy Eucharist, Father Guanella strictly depends on the Council of Trent:

- which exposes the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament through the Transubstantiation. However, Father Guanella in the *1910 Regulations* does not mention it;

- which treated the Eucharist as Holy Communion, food of the soul.

Father Guanella dedicates paragraphs 3 and 4 of chapter 11 on that issue.

- which presented Holy Mass as the way to procure the Eucharistic presence and the Eucharistic food. Father Guanella talks about Holy Mass in chapter 12, among the “Pious Exercises of a Community”.

After Vatican II and the present Church Magisterium, this way of understanding Holy Eucharist is lacking. Theology puts at the center of Christian life the celebration of the Holy Mass. (1) Holy Communion (as the most valid way to participate in the Sacrifice of Christ) and (2) Adoration to the Blessed Sacrament must depend on the Mass, because the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament goes on even after the celebration of the Mass. The real presence of Jesus has to constantly refer to the Mass

Regarding Community Life, the *1910 Regulations* follow the 1907 Constitutions which do not provide a systematic exposition of community life. Father Guanella makes some references to it especially when talking about priests and brothers and the relationship that should unite each other. Community life is considered in a rigid way: living together, praying together, and working together.

He writes: “*In what does community life consist? It consists in performing together works of good for the body, the mind and the heart. Consequently, the life of a religious community consists in eating together, sleeping under the same roof, sharing the treasure of knowledge and wisdom, and above all in joining in faith and charity for meditation, spiritual reading, reception of the Sacraments, and for other practices established by the Rule.*” (p.127)

That description was the common view of *community life* that at the time everyone agreed upon. It influences also Father Guanella in enforcing the exterior aspects that makes community life a true community life. Today, without disregarding the importance of canonical norms and exterior aspects of community life, the theology of religious life underlines more the *communion of life*, because there are religious who are not living under the same roof and are not sharing the same table. Of course, we find in the *1910 Regulations* everything we need to give to our community life its first valuable aspect, communion of life.

5. Some characteristics of the 1910 Regulations

Through his words, life-experiences, and style of life, Father

Guanella shows his mind and his heart. The *1910 Regulations* mirror perfectly mind and heart of the Founder and Father; it proposes the most significant issues of his spirituality and mission; it is a program to carry out in our life.

a) *The Regulations reflect the life experiences of Father Guanella.*

I quote here a note from Father Guanella that it seems refers to his personal experience when, still a child, he leaves his family and village, and meets the cold and pedantic environment of Gallio Academy. *“The first and most diligent care should be given to children who, after leaving their home, take their first steps within our House. Here they should find one who becomes a loving father and a compassionate mother to them.”* (p. 15)

Though in these Regulations he does not mention the preventive system, the above few lines summarizes the soul of that system, and shows the loving heart of the Founder.

Another passage will confirm our assertion.

- *“Regarding the Novices, the Master of Novices must consider that they are like birds that have been taken away from the freedom of the woods and tamed.”*

- *“They should not be unreasonably threatened or frightened. More flies are caught with a spoon of honey than with a barrel of vinegar.”*

- They should be treated with kindness *“as children who are given milk as food, and then, little by little, offered solid food.”*

- They should receive a formation suitable to the needs of the time, a formation that pays attention *“to the weak moral air we breathe, which is prone to excessive liberty and independence.”* (p. 113)

Is not this one the preventive system at work? Let us take in consideration two more texts that deal with the attitude of superiors toward their subjects.

“In speaking of superiors, it is much better to abound in understanding and mercy, rather than in rigor and justice.” (p. 20) Is he maybe opposing the rigidity of some of his relatives, a rigidity so common also in institutions? In July 1915, Father Guanella made a confidence: *“As a seminarian, I never laughed too much. My father was very stern... My mother was very sweet... My brother Father Lorenzo was rigid and strict...”*

Discipline in the House should be intertwined into a family-style

spirit. For that reason he draws attention to the necessity of leaving some room for independence: *“If from time to time we must grant something more to the residents, we should consider that the poor, however destitute on the street and without a home, still enjoy a freedom that is very dear to them. Therefore, it is good that, in keeping with the rules of the House, greater independence and freedom of action be reasonably permitted.”* (p. 20)

Once a priest, Father Guanella had many occasions to unveil the poverties that society presents. He is particularly hit by the anti-clericalism that multiplies efforts to stop the Christian message. He writes: *“The great duty of every Christian is not to tremble before danger, but to work with all his strength and in all the ways that Divine Providence suggests.”* (p. 34)

That was his program of life in the early days of his priesthood in Savogno, Traona and Pianello that urged him to search his way without letting himself to be influenced by prejudice and hostility. He had to do that because perhaps during the vision in Gualdera he had heard the Voice and he had put all his trust in that Voice. He wrote: *“Who among the Christians does not want to hear the voice of the Lord? ‘Come, because I have special plans of benevolence made for you! Do you not strongly hear my voice in your heart? Join my Heart, so that my Heart and yours will become one and, made rich by my virtue and empowered with my authority, you will master the hearts of many of your brothers. Now I would say: who is going to remain indifferent to the desires and words of the Heart of Jesus Christ?’* (p. 125)

To answer to the Voice of Jesus implied walking on a bed of thorns. After the numberless trials he had endured even from the Church he could say: *“...we must revive our faith and believe that we cannot do good other than by ascending the hard road to Calvary. We must be strong in that thought that the Lord never fails those who trust in him, that bread that comes from the hands of the provident Lord is always sweet, and more so when it costs sweat and pain.”* (p.111)

There is a secret if we want to validly cooperate with God's plan: it is our awareness of being totally depended on Him. Father Guanella used to repeat often that we need to distrust ourselves and put our confidence in God. *“We must build a structure so high that it touches heaven... We are poor and sick individuals, poor beggars, and yet we must build structures and conduct battles. Because of this, arises the great need to distrust ourselves and put our confidence in God, to destroy our proud ego, so that the Lord only may reign in our heart.”* (p.45)

He suggests to his confreres the necessary conditions so that the Houses may multiply and flourish. They are the same conditions that he

himself had tenaciously followed in his vocation as a founder: *“It is necessary that a new foundation be felt so deeply and vividly perceived as if it was already realized. It is necessary that this inner feeling is directly or indirectly confirmed by the legitimate superiors...Difficulties, doubts, and oppositions will never be lacking. However, they should strengthen rather than weaken the good resolutions.”* (p.116)

Among his most cherished memories, there is one that stands out: Sr. Clare Bosatta, the true model of Guanellian life. He does not name her, but he is thinking of her when he writes: *“Certainly the group of relatively perfect ones will be rare. However, a few are enough to give the good fragrance of religious virtue. One or more are enough to become a firm pillar in the foundation of a new Institute... It is not asking too much from a community to use its diligent dedication and prayers for the purpose to have at least a few or even only one religious, reaching the top of religious perfection.”* (p.44)

As a summary of his life-experiences, Father Guanella leaves an affirmation overflowing faith and trust: *“We are like chicks under the wings of our mother, Divine Providence. We must always and in everything entrust ourselves to Divine Providence who arranges everything on time and according to its largeness and measure...always waiting for the hour of divine mercy to strike. The plans of the Lord cannot be anticipated.”* (p.115)

b) The Regulations mirror his way of life

Regarding ways of life, it is noteworthy what Father Guanella has to say about the character of the Institute of the Servants of Charity. In the Regulations, he mentions first the nature of the Guanellian vocation and its purpose: *“...to care for poor children, to assist the aged, and carry out the apostolic life ministered preferably among the poor.”* (p.73)

A first characteristic is *“...to give a ready hand to all those works of charity requested by the poverty of the Institute and by the circumstances of time, place, roles, etc.”* (p.73). We should recall here the constant working of Father Guanella from the time of his childhood until the last days of his life.

A second characteristic is that *“the distinctive trait of the Servants of Charity must be a very charitable and familiar way of acting in their dealings, conversations, and general conduct in and outside the House.”* (p.73) We should live side by side with the poor; be aware of their trials; give an answer to their cries, according to the exhortation of Pope Leo XIII who

“recommended to the clergy that they should go from the church into the public square and reach out to the real needs of the poor, be they financial, social, spiritual, or religious.” (p.73)

To his spiritual children, the Founder recommends a simple, sober and hard-working way of life. *“It is enough for the Servants of Charity to live with what the Rule prescribes: simple food, which is healthier; one cassock on and a second at the laundry; a decent room for shelter. They must be content with this according to the circumstances of health, age, role and place. The joy of serving God consists in this and the progress of their spiritual life as well.”* (p.109) *“It is also necessary that everyone, according to his abilities and gifts received from God, lead by example of a very sober and mortified life-style.”* (p.110)

A third characteristic is described as *“...a spirit which is most tolerant, open-minded, and inclined to mercy rather than to justice.”* (p.74) Father Guanella reminds such spirit of mercy to those in charge of discerning vocations to the Institute: *“...as long as the need of personnel is urgent, it will not only be excused but advised that the superiors of the Institute incline more easily toward mercy than justice.”* (p.36) In fact, in a page before, he wrote: *“An Institute, that at its beginnings needs the help of many, in order to have many vocations, could and should proceed with an open mind and a big heart and accept also those with moderate intellectual abilities.”* (p35)

Father Guanella's choice between the method of Father Bosco and his mentor and spiritual director Father Cafasso. The latter said: “Little but good;” while Father Bosco in his turn said: “Much, though not perfectly done.” Father Guanella knows that both are saying the right thing. St. Cafasso was referring to Jesus who had begun his ministry with a little flock. The idea of St. Bosco was valid too because of the great amount of good that the Salesians were doing. He had to make a choice. Father Guanella summarizes: *“Little as we are, we consider ourselves disciples of Father Bosco, nourishing the desire of following in his footsteps.”* (p.36)

For sure, at the beginning of 1900, society was less complicated, and the Church less demanding. Today, is it right and feasible following the example of Bosco and the choice of Guanella? How can we carry out the Guanellian spirit of mercy in the circumstances of our present day and be respectful of the Church's normative legislation?

The spirit of mercy has to lead superiors: *“It is better that the Superior*

General fails out of mercy rather than out of excessive justice.” (p.99)

Even among confreres the same spirit should enliven their relationship: “*We believe that at present every religious is carrying out his ministry according to the right intention, and, when in some doubt, no one therefore - should be viewed as a bad religious. It is better to use mercy rather than justice.*” (p.127)

Together with the spirit of mercy, Father Guanella in the Regulations gives ample space to **discretion**, a principle very much present in his life as Founder and father. “*The Superiors of the House must be reasonable and discreet, and demand a better contribution from those who have been more blessed with gifts, either from nature or grace, than from those who have received less.*” (p.43)

It was his practice to follow the statement: “*To do a little good to oneself and to others, we need to make use of man as he is, little, fragile, and mortal.*” (p. 35) God himself behaves like that in our regards. Other times Father Guanella borrowed from Don Bosco: “*Very good is the enemy of good!*” It does not mean that we have to renounce seeking the great ideals of perfection, or to live on earth with no desires and enthusiasm. He does not concede anything to lukewarmness and laxity. We will see that, when taking into consideration the project of Father Guanella.

His discretion comes from his being aware of the diversity of gifts of nature and grace that the Lord grants to his children. Demanding from every religious the same results would be unjust and even a contradiction. On this point Father Guanella is very clear, and he reveals a good balance between his spirit and his deeds. He writes: “*Every member of an Institute, besides having the duty of his part, has also the right to expect that all the members, according to their abilities and grace received from God, make every effort to achieve the salvation of their souls for their own sake and for the good example to their confreres.*” (p. 8)

Father Louis asks from each religious a serious and constant commitment to live their religious life. He is perfectly aware that for each one of them God sets forth different goals; that their collaboration to God's grace shows different degrees, because they are influenced by the fragility of human nature. He insists: “*It is well known that the perfection of religious vows is like an eight-step ladder that we climb step by step according to the energies we possess and according to the grace we receive from God.*” (p.9)

Father Guanella uses discretion because he knows that, even within the same vocation, each one of us has our own path to walk on. He insists to use graduality in our walking that at the same time demands determination

and coherence. *“It is absolutely necessary that every Servant of Charity joins the Institute with right intention; that he possesses the ability to keep its rules; and that he applies himself to the task with good will, allowing God's grace to lead his soul to perfection.”* (p.9) *“Certainly, everyone is absolutely bound to observe the Rule with punctuality according to the degree of knowledge he possesses, according to the degree of virtue he possesses, and above all according to the degree of grace he can obtain from God.”* (p. 127)

We need good common sense, charity, and prudence when requesting according to justice what each religious can give and do, always and in all circumstances. Father Guanella purposely mentions discretion in regards of mortification. *“How much must one mortify himself? He must mortify himself with all the strengths of his soul, with all the powers of his body. He must mortify himself as much as the Lord grants him, and as he feels able to do. He must strive reasonably as far as obedience advises him, as much as one feels, and as much as his superior prudently suggests. Nothing more, nothing less.”* (p. 57)

Wisely, the Founder mentions that a religious has to ask for the advice and the approval of his superiors in order to discern if God is truly calling him to a higher level of extraordinary virtue, or to carry out a more severe way of life. *“If some of the Servants of Charity are called by God in a special way to exercise extraordinary acts of penance, they must not trust in themselves but they must submit themselves to the Rule and the directives of superiors.”* (p.72)

The discretion of the Founder appreciates the talents that each religious has, a discretion that rejects whatever is comfortable to our liking and not totally corresponding to God's call. In practicing poverty, he writes: *“It would be harmful for one who, feeling himself called to a strict observance of poverty would not trust fully in Divine Providence. Yet, it would be equally harmful for one who, falsely considering himself called to exercise such a high virtue, would expect to leave everything to Divine Providence and to receive from God what is needed when it is needed... Lack of trust, in the first instance, would be a dangerous error; presumption, in the second case, would be not a less disastrous error.”* (p.53)

That criterion regards also administration. He recommends: *“Two extremes must be avoided: undue rigor and undue indulgence. The superior of the House must be prudent in making use of the means sent by Divine Providence.”* (p.39)

Discretion leads him to attest: *“Since it is a religious Institute, it must*

make provision so that the community might be economically sound according to reason and to the intentions of our Mother Church, while permitting some members to desire or exercise poverty in a higher degree of perfection.” (p.101)

When looking for financial help for his Houses, Father Guanella does not restrict himself to pray to the Lord and to trust in Him as Father Cottolengo was used to. On the other hand, he is neither comfortable to follow the system of Father Bosco who “prays and makes a lot of noise at the same time”. For himself and for his disciples, he decides to choose a middle way between the two systems.

Father Guanella clearly affirms that in opening a new House we should prefer the one that shows more evidently the intervention of Divine Providence. However, he does not disregard the human support of benefactors either. At the end he says: “*It is much better to be in a situation in which we have to depend on divine help rather than on man's providence.*” (p.117)

Even when welcoming postulants, Father Guanella suggests showing affection and energy, but also discretion so that both Congregation and postulants may find the necessary room to exercise their freedom. He recommends for postulants and novices: “*The human heart is a great but dangerous power in man. In accepting applicants to the Institute, it is prudent to proceed by steps.... If the new member is good, he will be an asset to the Institute. If he is unsuitable, he might become more troublesome than useful. Hence the need to acquaint each other.*” (p.37)

This high respect toward people and the gifts they had received from God, on the one hand presses Father Guanella to require from them all they can give; on the other, it explains his behavior that is very practical and deeply human.

I would like to offer some instances of that human wisdom that finds confirmation in many events of his life. He writes: “*The strength and progress of an Institute depend on the ability to place with precision each saint in his fitting niche.*” (p.106)

A confrere is bound to give to the Congregation the best he can, and a superior is asked to take into consideration the gifts that confreres possess. The Founder believes that holiness requires heroism and abnegation. However, he thinks that superiors have to give to the confreres a role “*in which they can experience the satisfaction of doing daily some good that can be seen and felt.*” (p.25)

Isn't that assertion valid to all?

Father Guanella, when describing the characteristics of the Master of Novices, gives a picture of the Servant of Charity: *“A character too pessimistic and not pleasant, too introverted and not very effusive, sensitive yet irritable, good yet too sentimental, faith-filled yet too unyielding, pious yet rigid and shortsighted, with zeal but untimely and lacking in prudence, may hinder the good progress of a religious family, and might disgust the group of novices in formation who are like honey-bees in their bee-hives.”* (p.113)

He requests from the confrere that *“his bearing be serious, but at the same time open and spontaneous... He should not set himself above the average Christian and priests, nor should he think that he is something more than they are. In conversing, he should be concise, a man of few words, yet able to be clear in what he has to say...”* (p.76)

He is not afraid to affirm that: *“It is good that the governing body is changed for its own sake and for the sake of its subordinates.”* (p.89)

When in a council meeting superiors are making some decisions, they should always keep in mind the confrere that has to carry out those decisions; they should settle modalities and times of execution; they should request from the confrere his availability, and to check if he is suitable. Father Guanella knew perfectly the pros and cons of people: *“Children should never be employed for a long time or for hour-long services in Church on the same day, because it would cause their piety and devotion to abate.”* (p.120)

c) The Regulations reflect his idea of religious life

Let us see now how Father Guanella in his *1910 Regulations* presents religious life in general and in particular the Guanellian religious life. As matter of fact, the whole text revolves around that subject. The few passages that I mention will point out the Guanellian project of religious life, and will confirm the insistence by which Father Guanella urged his religious to reach the highest levels of holiness. Every single religious has to reach the same goal. However, each religious has to reach that goal according to the grace he receives from God; but above all by his personal determination to pursue perfection.

Father Guanella is aware that religious profession is a juridical act that binds both Congregation and confreres. He writes: *“A real contract has been made between the Institute and its individual members. As a result, the*

individuals consecrate their energies for the preservation, the increase of the Institute, while the Institute takes upon itself the obligation to provide for the material and spiritual needs of its members, always and especially in time of need.” (p.77)

Yet, Father Guanella goes beyond the mere juridical or exterior aspect of religious life. Religious profession is a mystical marriage with the Church and Jesus Christ. He writes: “*This is said about those Catholics who feel the call, yet have not espoused the Holy Church by taking religious vows. However, once their union with Jesus Christ and the Church has taken place, religious must put all their body and heart into their sacred marriage that becomes an indissoluble bond for them. The immaculate and holy life of Mary and Joseph should be an example and help to them.*” (p.126)

Religious profession is then a gift from God and strictly binds each religious to Jesus Christ and his Church: “*To be called to follow the evangelical Counsels is a special grace of God, by which a Catholic from the condition of a simple servant becomes a friend in the House of the Lord, a confidant of the Heart of Jesus.*” (p.42)

Spouse, friend, and confidant: these three words are clearly beyond mere juridical, rigid features of religious life! By professing religious vows, a religious begins a journey that brings him to become an image, an icon of Christ. The Servants of Charity should “*resolve to grow day by day in zeal and charity, to become living and speaking images of the Divine Apostle of Charity, Jesus Christ the Savior.*” (p.74)

It is a journey that never ends, nor goes to rest, or to vacation: “[A religious] *must proceed firmly and securely on his way to perfection until he reaches the summit of Calvary to die as a martyr with the King of martyrs.*” (p.48)

You have just read how Father Guanella intended his life as religious, his plan of life, the life he personally had carried out and had proposed to his spiritual children. It is a journey that takes the entire life of a religious: “*To see things as God sees them, and learn how to conform ourselves to it, as well as to love the truth which is God himself and to seek his resemblance, constitute the great enterprise which requires the effort of the entire life of a Christian.*” (p.70)

He never ceases to remind his disciples that in religious life everything leads to the supreme goal of perfection and holiness: “*To become a perfect follower of Jesus Christ, [a religious] must renounce all persons and things of this world. Without changing his human nature, he must live as an angel. He must not have his own will, but he must trust completely in God*

and obey Him, so that the Heart of God and his human heart will become one sole heart. This is a very high perfection. This constitutes the greatest happiness. In this very endeavor we must place all our efforts. To this end Institute, Rules and Constitutions aim, as do the zeal of the superiors, and the teaching experience of virtue.” (p. 45)

To persevere in that journey toward the summit of Christian life, religious need first of all a great amount of humility: *“The more a religious rises to acknowledge the most high holiness of God, the more will he humble himself in knowing that he is the lowliest worm and a despicable creature.”* (p. 71) Humility calls to a necessary life of deep communion with the Lord. Perhaps, Father Guanella recalls either Sr. Clare Bosatta or a personal experience when he tells the novices: *“When the Lord calls to such heights, He certainly convinces a Christian soul to retreat into solitude to intimately communicate with Him.”* (p. 42)

The expression *“intimately with God”* is characteristic of novitiate. That intimacy will intensify in certain moments; but it will be necessary when the journey will be tiring and climbing toward the summit becomes harder. Mysticism is not something reserved only to a few disciples of Jesus. On the contrary, it is an invitation to all Christians! In other words, religious life consists in following Jesus Christ as he is understood and proposed by the Rule: *“The Servants of Charity must be like good little sheep that follow the Divine Lamb. Imitating Him and together with Him they follow the path pointed out by their rule and their immediate superiors.”* (p. 74)

Father Guanella makes clear that we follow Christ through the exercise of charity: *“[The Servants of Charity] not by words but by deeds have followed the example of Him who has paved the way by preceding all with the example of charity, and following it up afterwards with words of holy doctrine.”* (p. 11)

“Doing good” and the example of Christ's charity are not something that affects the Guanellian religious life from without. On the contrary, they characterize our religious life from within. According to Father Guanella, the great law on which religious life is built has to be found in the Sermon of the Mountain, the Beatitudes. Beside the spirit and practice of the Beatitudes, Father Guanella stresses the exercise of works of charity. In his Rules and Constitutions, he follows the indications of the Church and distinguishes between primary purpose and secondary or special purpose. In his mind, however, they both are strictly united into one purpose as love of God and neighbor is one commandment.

In the *Statute of the Sons of the Sacred Heart* (1898), he writes: “The

purpose of this Institute is the sanctification of its members, both priests and brothers, through the practice of the evangelical counsels and the exercise of works of charity in general.”

The same concept is repeated almost literally in the *Constitutions of the Sons of the Sacred Heart* (1899): “The fervent love for God produces a warming affection of charity toward our neighbor, because the love for God cannot be parted from the love for our neighbor.”

In the *1905 Rules of the Servants of Charity* before the chapter dedicated to the 'Purpose of the Institute’, he adds another chapter, “Character of the Institute”. He writes: “The character of the Institute of the Servants of Charity

- is to conform ourselves to the examples of virtue and zeal of the Divine Savior;
- is to conform ourselves as much as possible through study and meditation of the life of the Divine Savior and of his Saints;
- so that we may reach the primary purpose of rekindling in our hearts the flame of sacred charity;
- and, as a consequence, to go and aid the soul of our neighbor.”

In the *1905 Regulations of the Servants of Charity*, Father Guanella says: “A sensitive and believing Christian cannot pass by the indigent without aiding him.” It was his will that his priests be truly imitators of Christ in the spirit of prayer, spirit of charity, and spirit of sacrifice.

In the *1910 Regulations*, a commentary of the 1907 Constitutions, Father Guanella makes a distinction between the two purposes, but at the same time he puts them together into one. Before concluding his reflection on primary purpose he adds: “*A Christian cannot be satisfied with thinking of and providing for himself only. He must also think and provide for the good of his brothers and sisters, especially those most in need of material and spiritual help.*” (p. 9)

In the paragraph dedicated to the secondary purpose he mentions the commandment of love (Mt 22:37-40) and says, “May the Servants of Charity be willing to enrich themselves with virtue and holy love [primary purpose] so that they may be able to share them with others in abundance. Who may “those others” be? They may be, in a very special way, the children and the elderly from among the poor [secondary purpose]. By what means will they obtain their noble aim? They will achieve their noble aim by following perfectly the Constitutions of their Institute. They will achieve it efficiently by the exercise of their apostolic life, which is both a goal and a very suitable means for their own sanctification as well as for the sanctification of their neighbor.” (p. 10)

The mission of the Institute is not extrinsic but intrinsic to its nature, an essential component to it. The true Guanellian cannot reach full communion with the Lord except through a close encounter with his neighbor, by giving them the material and spiritual aid they need.

Finally, let us follow the invitation of the Founder; the invitation that will become more binding the more it penetrates into our heart, and the more it is put into practice day in and day out. “Man is fallible; only God is infallible. Hence, we must follow entirely the word of the Lord rather than the word of men. Only God is holy. All men are more or less tainted with defects. Therefore, let us learn to converse above all with God and less with His poor creatures, men who live in this vale of tears. But we are in the world, and we must deal with people and things of the world. As a matter of fact, the words of St. Augustine will help us: In necessary things there should always be unity of thought; in doubtful things no one should be denied liberty to speak and act as he will; but in every act of your life always uses charity, bearing with one another.” (p.36)

REMEMBERING FATHER OLIMPIO GIAMPEDRAGLIA ON THE 30th ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DEATH PORTRAYAL OF Fr. OLIMPIO

(The following text has been taken from the “Commemoration of Father Olimpio Giampedraglia” delivered by Fr. Peter Pasquali at the 13th General Chapter (Grottaferrata, July 2-22, 1981) and from the biography “Father Olimpio Giampedraglia A noble and faithful love”, Nuove Frontiere 1982)

Today he speaks to us through his life

Among the many notes that Father Olimpio had jotted all over on many scraps of papers and note-books, - so telegraphic that, at times, it is almost impossible to understand their meaning, - I found a statement from St. Ambrose. There is no quote; however, it was written in good handwriting upon a piece of paper. It says: “Do not weep for my departure. Do not stop talking to me because I am still with you. I will love you in Heaven as I have loved you on earth.”

Hopefully, I am not misrepresenting those words if I lend them to Father Olimpio on the occasion of this General Chapter's opening day! Before my Report on the Congregation, I think it is right to say a few words about him and with him who was supposed to be on this podium to deliver his speech. Today he speaks to us through his life; a life that has become part of the history of our Congregation. It is to give him a due homage that I would like to offer some facets of his spiritual life.

First of all, we have to give praise to the Lord for having given us a confrere truly eminent in holiness. Secondly, we have to pray to the Lord so that He may help us to follow the great example of life that Father Olimpio had left us. Remembering him is a way to feel him still among us, a strong spiritual guide helping us to learn and to carry out the spirit and mission of our Founder and father.

“It is very useful to pray for the deceased because they can help us. -

Father Guanella wrote to his Confreres on Christmas 1908. More useful it is to pray for the soul of those who before leaving for Paradise - left us the great inheritance of their virtuous and exemplary life that we should imitate.”

Humble, faithful, and compassionate Servant of Charity

I am afraid to be too generic in saying that Father Olimpio had been a true Servant of Charity, faithful and merciful. He allowed the sanctity of the Founder to permeate him so that sanctity may be seen by his words and deeds. There is a small note-book in which Father Olimpio probably a novice writes down his inner thoughts. He quotes the exhortation of Father Guanella when ending the 1915 Norms: “The best way to strengthen our Institute and foster its expansion requested insistently every day by so many distressing needs, is by consolidating not only our material interests, but our religious spirit and the observance of our rules. This is a very noble and grace filled intent which deserves our full attention supported by all our desire and sacrifice. Thus, the Lord will bless us. And our vocation, so fruitful in saving souls and in spreading Christian charity, will be holy because it will make us holy and worthy of great glory.”

It has been the resolution of Father Olimpio who strived every day to carry it out with great will-power and sacrifice. In his religious and priestly life, he was in constant communion with Father Guanella in giving his contribution to the strengthening of the Congregation. To that, he gave the best of his energies.

It is not my purpose to present today either his biography or to recall significant episodes of his life. Hopefully, someone else will do it in the future. Today I would like to outline though incompletely his spirituality, the most precious inheritance that he has left to his confreres and friends. I will make use almost exclusively of some of his autobiographical pages that we were able to get, and of some testimonies close to him during his period of illness.

1) The beginnings of a hard-working life

Father Olimpio was tall and robust in stature, but, by contrast, his voice was feeble. He was by instinct reserved with a face either smiling or

attentive when listening or recollected when in prayer. Before 1977, while still a seminarian, he was admitted once to the hospital for appendicitis. During the painful months of 1980, it was because of his strong heart that he was able to undergo three surgeries one after another, to endure acute medical crisis and strong medicines that could have crushed less resistant people.

Father Olimpio was sincere, simple, and hard-working like the people of his mountains. By nature he was lively, attentive, and sensitive. He absorbed and lived the religious and human values of his Chiavenna Valley that he remembered and loved until the end of life.

Unfortunately, he had not enjoyed his parents for too long because they both died when he was just one year old. His grandmother took care of him and an aunt afterwards. We don't know anything about his brother who was killed in World War II in Greece. He was so reserved regarding his family that we do not know anything else, though those tragedies had for sure left a mark early in life.

We do not know either what God's grace had done in that little boy who was gifted with a prodigious memory, an uncommon intelligence, and an unusual innocent simplicity. The little information on those years that we have is due to his elementary teacher, Maria Trussoni. She was the one who introduced little Olimpio to Father Mazzucchi who was visiting the House of Chiavenna. She asked Father Mazzucchi to accept his little student in the seminary of the Congregation in Fara Novarese, because the boy had the right qualities to be a good priest and to do a lot of good.

2) Spiritual journey

The spiritual journey of Father Olimpio during his years of formation in Fara, Como, and Rome (where he prepared himself for ordination) is still a well kept secret. We can find glimpses of it in some resolutions that he wrote down on the day of his ordination to the Subdiaconate. They express the same public, final and total consecration to the Lord that was made previously at his perpetual profession.

“With generosity, gratitude and confidence, I approached today the Altar of my God infinitely good and merciful in his provident and adorable ways of Providence. On the Altar I offered as a Subdeacon the perpetual and irrevocable holocaust of all the thoughts of my mind, all the beats of my heart, and all the acts of my life. May the most amiable Heart of Jesus accept

the total renunciation of me! May the Lord keep it until the last day of my life.” (2 April 1938)

He was 23, and here we find already his main spiritual characteristics that I would like to expand a little.

a) Humble and Filial trust in God

It is the attitude typical of children. As children in front of God, we recognize our radical inability to live and to bear fruit when we are not sustained by the vital breath of divine grace. Confidence in God gives the necessary security that we can count on the infinite bounty of God and his merciful paternity, always and in spite of our sins. Is not this the secret that sustains a true humble soul? Is not this simplicity and love that Father Guanella lists among the spiritual characteristics that those who want to join his religious family should express? “...*Here it comes a spirit of simple humility by which a religious may see - in everything and always - the Lord who disposes of people and things, so that he, the religious, may never fall into useless complaining or foolish comments*”.

Among the resolutions that Father Olimpio wrote in Barza (11 September 1938) there is the following one: “I will make sure to live in the presence of Jesus in holy simplicity and innocence”. When he had received the order of Subdiaconate he wrote: “To Jesus I have asked Humility, Purity, and Love as his gift for me and for my loved ones”.

As a confirmation that Father Olimpio constantly strove to practice humility, the following is a letter that he wrote to the Pastor of St. Cassiano Parish on the occasion of his 25th anniversary of Ordination.

“Dear Pastor...It is a great grace from the Lord, the gift of climbing the Altar for 25 years. However, how many responsibilities we have accumulated on our shoulders! For that reason, I think that we priests should by instinct run away from external celebrations and prefer to bury ourselves in recollection and silence. You have promised me that those celebrations on October 13th are strictly spiritual. I am pleased and thankful, and for that reason I accept and I will come. That day is also particularly dear to me because we celebrate the last apparition of the Blessed Mother of Fatima. Make sure that my 25th anniversary be only a spiritual affair! What is only external choreography should be excluded. I would like that the singing of the Holy Mass be done by the congregation; that I can say two words after the Gospel; that no guest be invited except my dear friend Father Antonio Zubiani and my cousin Father Antonio Scaramellini. In my prayers I always

remember the living and the deceased population of the village that saw me as a child. When I left it 38 years ago, I brought with me in my heart the comforting memory of many good and dear people. I will be grateful if you would ask your parishioners to pray for me, for my soul, because no one has more need of prayers than a priest...”

b) Along the adorable paths of Providence

A second consideration stands out from his writings: God leads each individual. Therefore, he feels that the Lord accompanies him by the “admirable roads of Providence”. Father Olimpio had truly understood that the Lord disposes everything in order to carry out his plan of salvation; a plan which we have to welcome as openly as possible, and to collaborate with it even when things are not going according to our expectations. Under that perspective, we can evaluate the religious life and priesthood of Father Olimpio who kept himself faithful to God's plan under all circumstances. Fidelity is the main virtue of a “servant” because he puts himself totally under God's wings. “It is God who does!” Father Guanella too had carried out his faith as a faithful abandonment to God's Providence, who knows better than we our last destination and the roads on which we have to walk. How many times Father Olimpio had accepted his illness as God's will, a God who is good and wise in everything He does!

c) Fidelity

Fidelity had been the exterior uniform of Father Olimpio. He was a man of precision in remembering names, people, places, dates, quotes. He was precise in his talks and writings; even in proofreading. While his desk and office were a pure mess, his mind was perfectly clear and methodical. He was a meticulous man. Because of that, I think, he never wrote anything significant besides his PhD thesis in Theology and Canon Law. I have heard many times that Father Olimpio was the “man of the law”, in the right sense of the word! Not only because he had studied Canon Law, but also because he had the cult of the rule, and he cared about the observance even of the smallest things. Sometimes he was wrongly perceived as the man who was excessively bound to the letter. For sure, at times he had to do it, keeping in mind the formation received and the general mentality of the time. I assure you that in the law he had seen above all the promotion and the defense of true values. He always had shown a great respect to people, even those who

were plainly disregarding the law.

While for a certain period of time, in order to be a faithful interpreter of Church norms, he had shown rigidity regarding seminary formation (previous mistakes taught him to do so), he soon reconciled the right requests of the Church with the spirit of understanding and mercy proper of the Founder.

Father Olimpio had been faithful to the Founder, the Congregation, and the Church. He loved history; he was an avid reader on everything regarding asceticism and spiritual theology; he was a regular in the Major Superiors Meetings in Rome.

We have to mention that he was very knowledgeable on the writings and life of Father Guanella, our father. A proof could be his articles in our bulletin 'Charitas' from 1970 throughout 1980; his ceaseless help to our Sisters as their Ecclesiastical Assistant, especially in the preparation of their special general chapter. I vividly regret that he never committed to paper his knowledge of the Founder and the Congregation! How many confreres he had met! How many confidences he received from Father Mazzucchi, who esteemed him greatly and with whom he spent several years. We have nothing!

In life, Father Olimpio had been a faithful imitator of the Founder's spirituality in his prayer life, his spirit of sacrifice, and kindness. The best proof of his fidelity and love for the Congregation had been (1) his acceptance to lead the Congregation during the very tumultuous moments of the after Vatican II; (2) his faith in the mission that the Congregation is called to carry out in the Church, in spite of limitations and inconsistencies of ours; (3) never showing any discouragement in front of painful trials; (4) and allowing himself to be always led by God's Providence.

Father Olimpio had been always faithful to the great values of Christian, religious and priestly life. When he offered himself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, he wrote: "May the Lord receive and guard my offering until the last day of my life. May my life be truly Jesus from now on: Christ lives in me! Jesus in the Eucharist, Jesus on Calvary! While I was prostrated in front of the Altar, I told Jesus to take me away now rather than being unfaithful to him later."

He was faithful to Jesus all his life; faithful to the love of the Heart of Jesus manifested on Calvary and on the Eucharist. Faithful with the motherly help of Mary. Eucharist, Calvary, Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary Most Holy had been for Father Olimpio and Father Guanella the constant points of reference in their faith life.

His Mature Years

Father Olimpio resolved to be a humble and faithful servant, a Servant of Charity in everything. We find this resolution in the notes he wrote on the day of his ordination to the Diaconate (11 June 1938). There he underlines the joy of being at the service of God and of receiving his love in a relationship of perfect charity. More notes could be found in some few pages he wrote for his Priestly Ordination received at the Sacred Heart Shrine in Como, where the body of the Founder was at the time buried (14 September 1938).

I quote entirely the last page without any comment of mine. To me it shows close affinity to the letter that Father Guanella wrote on the occasion of his First Solemn Mass.

1) First Mass resolutions

“I am a priest forever in the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus! The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, had come upon me and had filled my soul with his divine charisms. I have become the friend, the confidant, the dispenser of Jesus' love. I am the love of Jesus Christ. Jesus could not do anything more for me. And what about the divine powers that He had bestowed on me? Offering, absolving, blessing, and preaching: offices that make me tremble because of my absolute unworthiness. Yet, I should not be discouraged: Jesus requests from me my good will. He will take care of everything else! Is He not omnipotent? Did He not win the world? With Jesus I can do everything.

“Priesthood! It is not an end but a beginning; a decisive starting toward all the roads on which Jesus likes me to walk.

“Priesthood! You are the most beautiful day of my life! Just recalling that day my crosses will be light. Day of God's mercies! Day in which words have no place and the heart babbles incoherent words! Day in which we weep tears of joy and sorrow as well, tears that only the Lord can understand! It is the day when I saw how scarce is my preparation and how feeble is my love to Him.

“Priesthood and Sacrifice; Priesthood and Eucharist! They are sublime ideals that should fill my life. Today I said to Jesus very few words and even badly said. I have asked for his forgiveness for the little love that I had shown Him until now. I asked Him for the grace to love Him with the purest of loves until my last breath. I asked Him for the grace to be aware that I should be more coherent with what I am doing, to put into practice what I

say. In other words, I asked from Jesus the grace to live my Mass, and to die a thousand times before saddening his Heart.

“May Jesus, the Virgin Mary our Mother, my Patron Saints, the Angels and Saints help me to welcome this day of Ordination as the day of a decisive walking ahead like the sun that rises and goes ahead until the fullness of the noonday! O Lord, may I be all yours! I want nothing except the coming of your Kingdom in me and if possible in all hearts.”

It is truly a page that we should read at times and meditate so much that it may become ours. I am not commenting on it. I would like to underline only some expressions that are typical of the Guanellian spirituality of Father Olimpio.

2) Characteristics of his spirituality

First, humility: “I feel myself absolutely unworthy” - “how feeble had been my love for Him!” “I have asked for his forgiveness for the little love that I had shown to Him until now.”

Secondly, the offering of himself in total self-giving and full fidelity: “With Jesus I can do everything.” “Priesthood! It is not an end but a beginning; a decisive starting toward all the roads on which Jesus wants me to walk.”

Third, the great loves of his life: the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Paraclete, Holy Mass, Priesthood, Eucharist, the Virgin Mary our Mother.

His insistence is noteworthy on the footsteps of the Founder - on the affective aspect of Christian life that reaches sometimes the mystical experience. The day of Ordination is perceived as “the day of God's mercies”. The identity of a priest is expressed by a daring formula: “I am the love of the Heart of Jesus.” The resolution in this beautiful day is only one: “I asked Him for the grace to love Him with the purest of loves until my last breath.” The prayer that flows from his heart is total self-giving: “I want nothing except the coming of your Kingdom in me and in all hearts.”

Father Olimpio did not write down mere words. Those words had been a daily effort on his part to carry out this program of life until the last of his earthly days.

a) Man of prayer

He had been a man of prayer; a solid prayer, for it was founded on faith and focused on the center of the Christian mystery: the Eucharist. His prayer was expressed by a life of abandonment to God's goodness and acceptance of all His designs. It was a simple, prolonged prayer without being verbose; a regular and constant prayer to which he bore witness. It was a prayer that had sustained him especially during the difficult days of his not easy leadership of the Congregation and his suffering.

b) Man of sacrifice

“A man faithful to sacrifice”. At the end of his Retreat in preparation to Subdiaconate, he wrote: “Not roses or lilies, but thorns and crosses. At the same time I ask from You, and You cannot say no, fortitude and patience.” He had been coherent until the end. I am not aware that Father Olimpio was looking for crosses. He loved joy and life. But he was also ready to welcome the cross and to carry it on his shoulders in total fidelity to the Crucified Master. Very soon he had to carry the cross of losing the love of his parents, and the cross of a solitude that during the difficult years of adolescence makes life more painful. He quotes Psalm 27: 10: “My father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up.” How real those words were to him! It was a cross to him to leave, when 10, all the people dear to him, the pastor, his village, his valley that he almost photographed in his mind even in the smallest details, in order to reach the seminary of Fara (a day long trip by train from Chiavenna). It was a cross to adapt his lively character and simplicity to the seminary's discipline, for sure much more severe than today's.

c) Man of compassion

Two days before dying, while in his bed of suffering, he asked Bro. Stucchi what he was reading. Brother replied that he was reading passages of Pope John Paul II's Encyclical, *God rich in mercy* that was just published. “Please, read me some passages,” he asked. That sound of those words was the last hr heard before falling into coma and dying: a meditation of God's mercy; a mercy that had accompanied him since his birth; a mercy to which

he bore witness on the footsteps of Father Guanella.

Compassion had been his program of life and government. After his re-election (1 August 1976) he said that he wanted to approach the Heart of Christ (who reveals the Father) for the propagation of the kingdom of charity in the spirit of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the merciful".

It is the mercy of God the Father and of Jesus the he wanted to communicate; a mercy that had become resolution and program. Compassion is the dominant aspect of the Guanellian spirituality: "The Institute has to show through the results of its zeal that the charity of Jesus Christ is a heavenly treasure, a medicine for human infirmities, and providence to the growing poverties (1905 R)". If God is the Father of all and provides to all; if the Heart of Christ is the revelation of the merciful love of the Father, our words and deeds too should show in front of men the mercy of the Father and of the Heart of Jesus. Our Congregation has a future if we will be faithful to that program as Father Olimpio had been.

Father Olimpio continued in his acceptance speech for his re-election: "Carrying the cross joyfully is beatitude." To continue to be superior, to be example and model to those who want to make present the mercy of the Father and of Christ, demands sacrifice and cross. Only a sacrifice welcomed joyfully may be transformed into love and mercy. He closed his remarks by remembering Mary, Mother of Mercy, the Blessed Mother venerated in the Gallivaggio Shrine, the first shrine that he knew as a child, the shrine where he prayed so many times, the shrine that he visited every time he passed by. Mary, Mother of Mercy, had been his Blessed Mother. To her, he took inspiration for his ten-year-long government. Because of her, he turned to be truly merciful.

Father Olimpio has always put at the center of his spirituality and prayer the evangelical mysteries that more recalled and exemplified the merciful love of the Father: Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Eucharist, and the Blessed Mother. He had been full of understanding and mercy toward his superiors. He supported them all the time; he obeyed and defended them even when he differed from their opinions or when he did not share their ways or methods.

Sometimes he was accused of being "too diplomatic," not because he was hiding his timidity and conciliatory personality, but because he did not want to compromise the value of authority, and not make things worse out of what he was supposed to correct. I have to be honest and say that, during his period as superior general, he defended when necessary his confreres in front of Church authorities.

He did his best to be understanding and merciful with his confreres. He was not stupid, ill-equipped, a simpleton to whom everything was fine. He knew how to evaluate events and people with great wisdom and prudence. Most of all he wanted to persuade, to convince, to sustain, to forgive, and to help as much as possible. I am one hundred per cent sure that no one had ever heard Father Olimpio either criticizing or being impolite with someone. His attitude was to pardon, to find extenuating circumstances, to save their good intention. He was slow we would say, too slow in taking some disciplinary measures against confreres. He was waiting until difficulties would clear up. Only when he was unable to find any way out, he unwillingly took the necessary measures. Yet, even on those occasions, his concern was not to humiliate the confreres, always leaving them a door open for any future change of mind. Is not this an act of holiness? Pope John Paul II said once: "Sanctity consists first of all in living God's love in spite of difficulties brought forth by history and life." Should not our Christian life be understood as receiving and donating mercy? Is not this one the mission that the Holy Spirit had entrusted to Father Guanella and our Congregation?

d) At the service of the Congregation

The more he grew in age, the more his shoulders were burdened by heavier crosses.

It was a cross to feel misunderstood too frequently because people believed him most of the times wrongly rigid in his principles, cold with people, more concerned about norms rather than people. He carried that cross without defending himself, complaining, or accusing anyone. It was a cross the call to lead the Congregation in a period of time when there was absolutely no calm. Even in our Institute the wind of rebellion was blowing; confreres were abandoning priesthood and religious life; the temptation of embracing the mentality of the world was increasing; current methods and criteria of Christian formation and education were rejected. New ideas and needs were pressing the Congregation from within and without, but we felt inadequate because of number, abilities, age, and health. The request for a clearer Guanellian identity and an evaluation of the validity of our ministry became more and more vocal.

Father Olimpio's task was to reassure those confreres who were in anxiety; to calm down those who were pushing for an immediate change of course; to

encourage those affected by discouragement; to keep undaunted the spirit of the young confreres so that they would not fall into indifference and apathy in front of what they were seeing in the Congregation.

It was even a cross his not being re-elected in 1964 as member of the general council after 12 years of being general councillor and secretary. We have proofs that humanly speaking he suffered because he felt rejected by his own brothers. He got the better of it with great faith and humility, however. He never protested; he never complained to anyone, but he continued to collaborate even though in a psychologically difficult situation.

e) The last five years

The cross of the last five years of his life. Almost unanimously, in 1977 he was re-elected superior general. After a year, health issues began to appear; first attacks of kidney stones, followed by glaucoma and several surgical operations. He never refused to attend to his office: participation to the General Consultation; visits to the Communities. The last tiring commitment was the visit (two months) to the Communities in Argentina, Paraguay, and Chile after which he was diagnosed with a tumor in the kidney that brought him to the hospital for other complicated surgeries. They had been six months of great suffering.

f) Patience and fortitude

During those months we discovered his Christian and human maturity, a great example of patience and fortitude. He never felt being a man above or different from other men: he confessed his fear of not being able to bear physical pains. Knowing that the time had come to practice what he had taught for years, and being aware of his fragility, he asked for prayers and he himself prayed a lot. He never complained about pain. It was evident he was under great pain, but it was also evident that he did not like to disturb us. He kept his pain to himself and accepted them as a way to do God's will.

Several times he asked to renounce his mandate as superior general because he could not fulfill his duty anymore. Nevertheless, he left to us, his councillors, to evaluate the situation, for the good of the Congregation, insisting that the Holy See had to be informed.

He asked for prayers constantly, because only in the Lord he could find

peace of mind, and the strength even to smile and to encourage others. Through God's grace he felt tranquility during the last steps of his journey of Providence that was leading him to His final encounter. He asked to see frequently his confessor. Every day he was receiving Holy Communion before a long preparation when he was sufficiently able to do so. When pain became too violent and did not allow him to rest or even to move, Father Olimpio was inviting the person caring for him to pray on his behalf. To Bro. Stucchi who spent most of time with him, he repeated: "Pray to the Blessed Mother, the Founder and Saints for their help... Today is All Saints, pray to them with devotion as the good women of your region (Brianza) are doing, as your mother did, as did the pastor of Fabbrica Durini, a truly holy man." He followed the prayers with his mind; a few times with his lips. He expressed his abandonment in God's hands through short prayers. When pain was bearable, he asked those present to read loudly the Holy Office or recite the Rosary.

His last messages

During his last months, Father Olimpio gave us many lessons on life. Room 609 on the 11th floor of Gemelli Hospital in Rome was transformed into a school of holiness. Those who were close to him said: "Only a life of fidelity and sound scrupulosity can keep a man in an attitude of confident abandonment to God and serenity among moments so tragic. Only those who took inspiration from the Lord Jesus who was constantly seeking God's will can be faithful like Jesus and desire not solace or healing, but only prayers so that God's will may be done in fullness. In those days we understood that life is a constant plan to pursue freedom. In his illness we perceived Father Olimpio free from any regret of not living longer; free from attachments to earthly things that could have made him sorry to leave them or use them anymore; free from worries. He loved the Congregation; however, he felt that he could be more productive by suffering than doing many other activities. A first thought was that such detachment was the result of a tired mind and a body under the influence of strong medications. We changed opinion once we have read his last will that he wrote with unsteady hand in September, while his health conditions were deteriorating. He showed detachment from things and even from life, a detachment that was a surprise to doctors and nurses too. It originated from the belief that he was in God's hands, that by dying he could have the opportunity to be

embraced forever by those divine and merciful arms.”

It seems to me that it is the only explanation for his constant return to prayer in the morning, even after a long sleepless night. Sometimes he showed concern for his personal salvation, an anxiety that assailed him at times, but always dispelled by the sacrament of Confession. With the nurses he was very attentive. Many times he did not bother to disturb them because they were taking care of other sick people. “The others” were always the concern of Father Olimpio. He refused to be a burden to his nurses. He adapted himself to their own ways, to their understanding and availability, and to sense when he could ask something or give something. It was his way to respect those with whom he had to share his day and responsibility.

We have to mention also **his love for the poor**. Even ill, his mind and heart went to the Guanellian apostolate the poor to which he generously had dedicated his life. In the morning of October 4, seeing his death approaching, he said regarding the poor: “The Lord is hungry today too. Be generous with the poor, with those in the Third World who are hungry. We have a lot of money. Give it away! Give it away!”

It was a concern that had been very strong during his government. He was not pleased to see money unused. To him it was a danger for the Congregation. He was afraid that religious were going to use it for their personal benefit rather than for charity, because Providence had sent it for the poor. Those words “Give...give!” recall the Gospel and the Founder's teaching. They reveal a man that had imitated them so much that at the door of death he forgot himself but not the poor.

Waiting to meet the Lord

Especially during the last weeks, Father Olimpio had to depend on everything from others. How hard it was for him, for he did not like to disturb! However, he showed the simplicity of a child, and was very grateful for any help he was receiving. When he was losing contact with reality because of medications, he talked about what he held most in his heart: preaching, remembering his confreres, dealing with problems of the Congregation, and praying.

He was aware that his days were counted; he did not talk much about it, only indirectly. He knew. When in November, Fr. Minetti and Fr. Gridelli went to say good-bye before going to Brazil, he told them, “Have a great visit. Yet,

be quick because you know my situation.”

On the afternoon of November 5, seeing that doctors could not do anything for him anymore, we decided to bring him home, to a room on the third floor of St. Joseph Nursing Home in Via Aurelia Antica. When we met him, he shook our hands and smiled. In a matter of minutes he became unconscious. Several confreres were present and we began the prayers for the dying while his pulse little by little lessened. A few minutes after 8:00 pm, Father Olimpio met his Lord to whom he had consecrated his life.

Our sorrow

Wearing priestly vestments, his body was exposed in the big hall of the House. Day and night confreres, seminarians, friends, benefactors, prelates and religious from all Rome came to pay their respect. His funerals were celebrated on December 9 in the Good Shepherd Church at the seminary by Cardinal Eduardo Pironio assisted by Fr. Egidio Viganò, superior general of the Salesians, and by our Vicar General, Fr. Peter Pasquali. Bishop Remigio Ragonesi was representing the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, Card. Ugo Poletti. Fr. Pasquali took the pulpit for the official eulogy. Card. Pironio too praised his friend and gave words of consolations to the Servants of Charity.

In the afternoon, the casket went north, to Como. The following day, in the Sacred Heart Shrine, the local Bishop of Como, Most Rev. Teresio Ferraroni presided at a solemn Mass. The emeritus Bishop of Lugano, Most Rev. Giuseppe Martinoli, and a large crowd of confreres, Sisters, diocesan and religious priests, and laity attended his funerals. He rests now in the tomb of the Congregation in the cemetery of Como. He ended his suffering. We did not. Because of his departure, we were mourning. However, we were consoled by Christian hope and by the presence among us of his words and example.

His last will and testament

Father Olimpio wrote his spiritual last will during the last weeks of his life. In it we can find the main aspects of his spirituality that were born on the day of his Subdiaconate.

“In front of the Crucifix received on the day of my First Profession, I adore

You, Most Blessed Trinity. I give You thanks. I give You glory because of Your life of light and love, and for everything You have done, especially the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption. Aware that the final encounter with the God of my heart is near, I desire to unite the sacrifice of my earthly life to the redeeming Sacrifice of Jesus. O Blessed Trinity, be always praised, loved and thanked! I am wondering about what the Lord will ask me. When will He come? For sure at the most providential moment! In the name of Jesus I ask the Father to help me to conform myself to the Master. I rely on the motherly care of Mary and in the Communion of Saints, especially my confreres. It is a privilege to be sick, because through sickness the Lord himself is visiting us. However, how poorly done is the union of my small sacrifice to His! O Jesus, have mercy on me! I am very sorry for not having corresponded fully to your eternal plan for me! I thank the Lord for having been born poor and lived poor. Unfortunately, I had not always lived the beatitude of poverty. I humbly and trustingly ask for forgiveness for not having corresponded fully to your grace; for giving more suffering to Jesus; for not having edified my confreres. I rely on the infinite goodness of God and on the merits of Jesus who deigned to call me as one of his friends. How many unknown graces had been the treasures of his Heart: his prayer, his word, his ministry, his Eucharist (*gift of the gifts*), his redemptive Passion, the effusion of the Holy Spirit, the sweet Immaculate Mother, the Church with her treasures, the call to a life of intimacy with Him and fraternal communion, the blessed life in Heaven!

The Holy Spirit's Love may grant me to close my earthly life by a perfect act of total assent to all the truths that the Master teaches and the Church asks us to believe; a perfect act of hope in God's goodness and in the infinite merits of my Redeemer; a perfect act of love in the Blessed Trinity and charity toward my brothers and sisters on earth as those in Heaven.

I desire that the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus be fostered according to the teaching of our Blessed Founder and the Magisterium of the Church. May the Lord grant his blessing and Holy Spirit to the Congregation of the Servants of Charity that had been to me a Mother, to the Holy Father, to the Bishops, priests and religious! A special farewell to my relatives, and benefactors from Omegna.

O Lord, let me see your face! Come, Lord Jesus!"

In this last will we find the Christian humility that urges him to ask God for forgiveness and to abandon himself to the infinite goodness of the Lord; the total offering of himself in union with the redeeming Sacrifice of Jesus. The theological virtue of charity, that makes him seeing God as a Friend, allows him to evaluate the gift of his love toward his earthly and heavenly brothers. Mysticism we find in his dialogue with the Blessed Trinity, in his humble talking to the “God of my heart”, in his concluding invocations from the Holy Scripture that open the door into the mystery of death, the joyful encounter with the Lord. “O Lord, let me see your face! Come, Lord Jesus!”

THE HEART OF CHRIST AND THE GUANELLIAN CONGREGATIONS

Conference delivered by Father Olimpio
at the Dehoniani Center, Rome

Centrality of the Heart of Jesus

Father Guanella (1842-1915) was beatified on October 25, 1964, and had founded two Institutes, the Servants of Charity, previously called Sons of the Sacred Heart, and the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence. His spirituality is focused around the person of Christ the Redeemer in His divine and human Heart. He belongs to the number of Founders that took inspiration from the same Source.

Very reluctant to talk about himself, on the last feast of the Sacred Heart that he celebrated here on earth, he told his confreres that since his early days he had cultivated this devotion; devotion that he later on spread as much as possible. He said that he received a special inspiration to put under the Heart of Jesus his charitable Institutes.

The devotion to the Heart of Christ in Father Guanella offers no special traits. It goes back to the Teaching of the Church, to the Saints (especially St. Mary Margaret Alacoque, St. Francis de Sales, St. John Bosco), and the common doctrine of theologians of his time.

In the “*Internal Regulations of the Sons of the Sacred Heart*”, Father Guanella reminds that “the Divine Heart of Jesus Christ is Patron, Custodian, Master and Lord of the House since its beginnings”. With trust and gratitude he affirms that his charitable works were born, developed and growing because of the Sacred Heart: “*Let us give thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for his assistance and blessings toward our Institute. Our charitable Houses are flowing out from the great Heart of God. It is He who is sustaining them and makes them flourish.*”

This devotion is expressed and is nourished by the cult in his honor, first of all in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and in Holy Communion. To Father Guanella “*the Eucharist is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the Tabernacle the Eucharistic Heart is truly and substantially present, and with the Heart his Blood, his Holy Face, the adorable Person of our Redeemer and Lord Jesus Christ.*” For that reason “*our chapel is our*

Paradise on earth, and the Heart of Jesus adored in the chapel is the joy of our heart.”

The Founder recommends other pious practices, as the Apostleship of Prayer, the First Friday devotion, the adoration, the Guard of Honor, the Friday fast, frequent invocations, participation at Eucharistic Congresses...

His devotion is not just a pile of pious practices (though various and fervent), but life, because the love of God symbolized in the Heart of Jesus had to inspire and inform our religious life in its entirety.

The soul of a religious has to welcome the invitation to enter into an intimate communion of dialogue and contemplation with the Heart of Christ, the Spouse. *“The Lord wills to speak with you, privileged souls, more intimately. For that reason, He had invited you to fix your eyes on the Heart of the Spouse of chaste souls. For that reason He made you hungry for the Bread that never tires us, but satisfies, strengthens, and makes us divine. For that reason He repeats: ‘Come to me!’”*

The study and the loving contemplation of the Heart of Jesus embrace all mysteries of Christ's life, understood under the light and love that comes from His Heart. In “The Month of Fervor” (1884), he wrote: *“We will reflect on the Sacred Heart in his relation to the mystery of the Incarnation, Birth, Life, Passion and Death of the Savior; as well as to his glorious Resurrection and Ascension into heaven.”*

In contemplating the Mysteries of Christ, a soul opens to an atmosphere of wonderful familiarity with the Lord: *“Consider what a good heart of a Father is the Heart of Jesus the Savior; know that you are pleasing Him; you are making Him happy; you are experiencing happiness; you open the house of your heart to Him.”*

A soul feels that the Lord sits at table with it and enriches it with his many gifts because, like the Blessed Mother, a soul may become His dwelling place. The soul “*observes*” and always deepens the divine excess of love for it. A soul *“Is moved, drinks the drops of the Precious Blood that comes down from the Cross; it invokes the grace for higher perfection; it greets the Lord with great affection; “converses and lives with Him enjoying His sweet charity.”*

Yet, it is not enough to *contemplate* and *taste*. At the school of the mysteries of the Heart of Jesus, the soul of a religious has to *learn* to practice all virtues. The Lord has to become the *mold* of his soul. Father Guanella writes to his Sisters in June 1905: *“The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the source of divine mercy that is bestowed abundantly upon you. It is the august divine*

Heart that is offered to you, apostolic souls, as a model of virtue, and as an example of love toward God and neighbor. He is your strength and comfort in your weakness.”

The soul of a religious has to feel every day more urgently the desire to seek perfection. However, the Founder says: *“The qualities of the Divine Heart of Jesus when well practiced form the best way to reach perfection.”*

According to Father Guanella, holiness is *“to go and nourish ourselves in the life of the Heart of Jesus Christ”*. There are many “nourishments” around, but the best and most necessary is the Eucharist. The Founder, a true lover of the Eucharist, recommends: *“Let us strive as much as possible to make ours the life of the Eucharistic Sacred Heart.”* If “life is given” it seems that there is a source: the child calls for the Father.

Father Guanella invoked the Heart of Jesus with many titles: ultimate Goodness, essential Mercy, Most merciful Heart, and Most compassionate Heart. However, the true title that he most attributed to the Heart of Jesus was *“fatherly”*. In his books *“In the Month of Flowers”* and *“Let us go to the Father”* he addresses Jesus as “Father”: *“The Heart of Jesus is a Heart of a Father”*; *“These words are from Jesus, your Father”*; *“The Heart of Jesus is the Heart of an extremely very good Father”*; *“O Lord and Father, I adore you and I give you glory”*.

The devotion to the Heart of Jesus consists therefore in a vital exchange. Jesus gives us his Heart of a Father; we consecrate to him our small heart like children. This admirable exchange is, in the belief of Father Guanella, the secret of sanctity and fruitfulness for his religious and Houses. In the *1899 Regulations* he wrote words that describe a program of life drawn straight from “the fountain of virtue and holiness”: *“The Lord Jesus is a Father so generous that He gives his Heart to those poor creatures who in their turn offer Him their poor hearts. Here we might explain the inner power that had given birth and growth to the ministry of the House of Divine Providence. Superiors should never be tired to say it over and over, and the subjects to listen at it over and over.”*

The Heart of Jesus, revelation of the Father, is one with the Father. By nourishing us of his love, He leads us back to the Father, who is the primary source of every good. The Founder says: *“Any time that you pray to the Lord, you should fix your eyes on Jesus and beg Him to accompany you to the Father. When you lean on Jesus' arm, you will go up faster; and when you arrive at the right hand of the Most High, you will be received joyfully by the Eternal Father. With the same confidence of the beloved Son, you will*

have then the opportunity to talk to God, and obtain from Him whatever is good for your soul, besides all those divine graces that are necessary to bring back to the Father the runaway children.”

In the devotion to the Heart of Jesus we can find the characteristic aspects of the two Guanellian Congregations as they appear from the writings and life of Blessed Guanella; the same aspects that were kept and developed in the history and traditions of the two Congregations.

I am going to briefly summarize some of them:

- a fervent devotion to the Blessed Mother, honored under the most significant titles of Mother of Divine Providence; Immaculate Heart; Our Lady of the Sacred Heart; Our Lady of Workers; Queen of Peace; Sorrowful Mother;
- a special devotion to Saint Joseph, the first friend of the Sacred Heart, model of interior life, patron of the dying, “vocation director” for vocations to religious life;
- a spirit of great submission to the commands, advices and desires of the Holy Father and legitimate superiors;
- the program *prayer and suffering*;
- an evangelical trust in Divine Providence;
- preferential service to and for the poor perceived as the living image of Christ and served as our brothers and masters. We should aspire to become voluntary victims for their benefit;
- *“a spirit of unassuming humility that makes the individual able to see always the presence of the Lord in everything;”*
- *“adapting ourselves, until the limit of convenience, to the exigencies of our living in society”*, showing always *“courtesy, self-confidence, tolerance, and that freedom of spirit that is a true gift from the Lord;”*
- a perfect right intention; a constant and contagious happiness in the Lord, sprinkled with a little bit of nostalgia for Heaven;
- a government built on family spirit both within the Congregation and with the patients of our Houses according to the inspiring preventive method of Fr. Bosco;
- the carrying out of the same Guanellian spirit in the two Congregations that should help each other.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart, soul of the Guanellian religious consecration

An example could be the new Constitutions of the Servants of Charity blended into the devotion to the Sacred Heart. We can underline some criteria:

- a) The constant reference to the Founder's words: "*The members of the Institute should be one heart and one soul with the mind and love of the Divine Heart.*"
- b) Rather than words, we had highlighted the substance of the mind of the Founder by avoiding expressions that could be ambiguous or reflecting a certain period of time no more appreciated today. We have underlined the fact that everything is from the initiatives of the merciful Love of God that should arise from us an answer of loving correspondence to His designs, and to our self-giving to the least ones.
- c) We had tried to present the "Person" of Christ relating with the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- d) Our religious vows, our common life, our charitable and apostolic activities are framed by the Love of Christ that provokes our answer, and unites us to his mission of evangelizing the poor.
- e) Prayer life should be a more intimate union with Christ who gives us his Spirit. Christ is present in it with his Grace and helps us to grow in Him by his Word and the Magisterium of the Church, by the Liturgy, the Sacraments, the Eucharist, "our Paradise on earth."

The devotion to the Sacred Heart, soul of the Guanellian apostolic mission

- a) *Handicapped people.* We have to treat them not as people worthy of commiseration and toleration, but as people we welcome and love. Father Guanella says that they are the masters of the House, because they are beloved by the Heart of Christ. Though they are limited in intelligence, they are stimulated by what they see and touch. Let us stimulate them to look frequently at the symbols of Christ's love, to pictures reproducing Jesus preaching, performing miracles, or dying on the cross. Let us invite them to show their love to Jesus through songs, kisses, clapping hands, drawings... We should stimulate

them to help each other just to make the friend Jesus more pleased. Let us form them in a simple and spontaneous piety, sure that the Spirit they had received at their Baptism will work in them in a very incredible way. They should understand that the Lord is always with us, especially in the Holy Eucharist. We should give great importance to the preparation of First Communion, Eucharistic adoration, celebration of the Holy Mass. They should participate in them according to what they are.

- b) *Abandoned elderly.* By personal and patient conversations, we should instill in them the certainty that they hold a special place in the Heart of Jesus Crucified, because they too are suffering and cooperating in the salvation of souls. Let us invite them to the Eucharist in its different forms. Let us accustom them to talk to the Lord present on the Altar. Let us form them to the commandment of mutual love in order to enjoy the gift of peace and to please the Lord.
- c) *Normal youth.* Their religious formation should be focused on the friendship with the living Christ, by presenting the Mystery of Salvation as a plan of love that requests from us an answer of love. The Eucharist is the center of everything.
- d) *Parishes and Missions:* Our Guanellian apostolate and ministry should take inspiration from the Founder. They should be formed by the love of the Father that is manifested in Christ and bestowed on us by the Holy Spirit. Let us lead the faithful to a vital tuning with the Heart of Christ by showing love toward the poor, the suffering and the dying (even through the Pious Union of St. Joseph), and toward all those who do not know yet Christ and his Church. We should gradually and prudently increase the many practices of honoring the Sacred Heart (first Fridays, hour of adoration...) and to present in a way more suitable to our times the ways the Sacred Heart is portrayed. All activities (catechesis, celebrations of the sacraments, associations...) should mirror in the faithful the desire of our Blessed Guanella: “*Let the life of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus be our life.*”

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