

## **THE GUANELLIAN MISSION IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH, FOR THE WORLD**

With the ‘Decree of Praise’ (Decretum laudis) of the Holy See, ‘Humanis miseriis sublevandi’ (*to relieve human miseries*) of August 1912, the Congregation of the Servants of Charity-Opera Don Guanella receives the first official recognition of its mission and later, in 1928, the approval of its Constitutions, which in the current formulation are expressed as follows:

*"The Holy Spirit, to reveal to the world,  
that God provides for his children with Fatherly care,  
called the Founder [Don Luigi Guanella and consequently we his disciples]  
and he made him ardent with charity and sent him to relieve human misery" (C 1).*

and further on:

*The divine call places us in the heart of the Church,  
making us share more deeply  
in his mission in the world  
and especially in his care for the poor.  
In the Church we must be witness of God's fatherly love  
and of the sacred value of each man,  
even of the least gifted,  
according to the commandment of the Lord:  
«Love one another, as I have loved you» (C 6).*

Church has received from the Lord Jesus the mandate to evangelize; it makes us participate in it and calls us to its service. Our Congregation, like any other, is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, since it is the Spirit who guides the Church in the fulfillment of her universal mission of salvation, in which we collaborate by responding to certain needs of that mission.

We are in the Church not as an independent reality, but as a living cell, in deeper communion of life with the whole Mystical Body, committed with it to root and consolidate the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to expand it in every part of the earth. Our fundamental title to be and to work in the Church as a Congregation lies precisely in the specificity with which the Spirit has raised us up and with his assistance continues to ask us: that is, the commitment to serve the poor (as Servants of Charity). From its very beginning the Church has been concerned with serving the poor and has entrusted this particular task to some of its members (cf. Acts 6: 1-7).

*"The Church recognizes in the poor and the suffering the image of her Founder, poor and suffering, she takes care to relieve their poverty and intends to serve Christ in them" (LG 8).* With the ministry of charity we participate in this commitment and intend to serve the Lord Jesus as the Founder asks us: *"The Servants of Charity, if they look forward with energy to take care of their poor children ... they will do a work of high glory to God ... To understand this, it is enough to recall the first teachings of Jesus Christ where he insinuates that any kind of good is done even to the last, that is*

*to the most unfortunate of one's brothers, it is as done to Jesus Christ*" (Reg. 1910, pp. 18f.; cf. Method, in Antol. B 15).

The poor is Christ. *"To the poorest and the most abandon is due not only an affection of charity, but esteem of veneration, because they represent Jesus Christ more closely"* (Regulations of 1899, Constitutions 1911).

Through our mission the Spirit reminds believers that *"only the charity of Jesus Christ is a heavenly treasure"* (Reg. 1905), that only in serving the poor one finds the true identity of the Christian, and that for this reason they will be judged on love: *"Jesus Christ will say to the just on the day of the final judgment: I was hungry..., and you have provided me with everything; come on..., my paradise is your paradise"* (Reg. 1910).

### **Mission as a gift of grace**

*"As if it were not enough for the heart of our Father who is in Heaven to have given us the Holy Church as mother and teacher, he wanted other particular societies to arise in it and from it responding to the special needs of the souls called by him with voices of predilection. These privileged societies are precisely the religious Orders and the many religious Congregations appropriate to the individual dispositions and needs of the times"*.

These words that the Founder wrote as an introduction to the Regulations for the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence in 1911 express his intimate persuasion: even his Work, which flowed from the Heart of Christ, was born in the Church and for the Church. Not just as a juridical fact. Much more: **as a gift of grace.**

For this reason, our mission is intimately connected with the mission of the Church, placed by Christ as the sacrament of salvation for all, and interiorly animated by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit, free in distributing all those gifts that contribute to expressing the spiritual richness of the Church of Christ, raised up our Congregation through Don Guanella and summoned us members of the same Church to the same Congregation.

The Spirit of the Lord willed our Work for the Church, in order to enrich it with the characteristics of our spirit and of our specific mission.

We want to express the mystery of Christ who, having made himself servant of humanity, bends over the weakest and reveals to them the compassionate and merciful love of the Father.

With our mission we are in the Church a **living witness of the Father's mercy** and a continuous stimulus for the Church to proclaim and live Christ's messianic program which is precisely a program of mercy.

Our mission therefore does not consist mainly in external "works" or "activities", but in configuring this aspect of the mystery of Christ and in the commitment to make it visible in the Church and in the world, placing ourselves at the disposal of those who are particularly tried by misery and suffering.

*"Our Institute, established in the midst of many oppositions and in great poverty, entrusted more to the Providence of God than to human prudence, must know how to continue its way and demonstrate by the fact to the world that God is the One who*

*provides with the attentive care of the Father to his children". It is always the Founder who urges us on. (C 49)*

Our mission is expressed in an "apostolate" in the sector of charity open to all those who in different ways and degrees are part of the one Guanellian family (priests, brothers, daughters of St. Mary of Providence, Cooperators) under the guidance of "Pastors" of the Church.

In fulfilling our mission of charity, we find the concrete way to respond to the personal vocation to holiness and to build the Kingdom of God in the structures of human society. Our charitable action, which originates from the gift of the Holy Spirit, finds in the Heart of Christ, the burning furnace of charity, the highest model and has as its purpose that of leading the poor to feel and live as children of God the Father.

### **At the service of the universal Church**

*"We are sent to the poor without distinction of race, nationality or religion, and with even greater urgency, the more vulnerable they are in their human dignity, and in their dignity as children of God "(C 64).*

Our Congregation, a gift of God to the entire Church, by its nature and by its specific mission of witness to the merciful charity of Christ is destined to be universal by its nature because charity is widespread. We cannot keep the gift received as an exclusive possession.

The Founder wrote: *"Our divine Savior, by ordering his apostles: - go and preach the Gospel to every creature, communicated a spirit of transmission to us as well and taught us to carry to distant lands that faith for which we glorify of the Christian name"* (Reg. 1911 for the FSMP).

Our XIII General Chapter (1993) which specifically dealt with the theme of the Guanellian mission left us this hope, which is also valid today: *"We wish that this longing of the holy Founder always remains alive in the confreres and prepares 'new hours of Providence'. Don Luigi Guanella with the moral commitment he left to his congregations 'the whole world is your homeland' demonstrated with conviction that charity is the necessary leaven for the progress of every society and culture, and that there can be no evangelization without witness of charity"*.

In addition to geographical expansion is very meaningful the encounter of the Guanellian mission with 'cultures' and with 'mentalities' different from that typical of the Lombard end of 1800, in which the Congregation was born, is very significant ... We recognize the importance and urgency of this commitment of translating Don Guanella's fundamental inspiration into the contexts of the various environments in which we come to work. Already the Founder recommended to our Sisters sent to the USA to undertake to study the language, customs and history of that people in order to be authentic witnesses of charity and to feel fully integrated in society (cf. Come with me for the missionary Sisters).

*"Along with us, [Servants of Charity], and engaged in the same mission and work are the Daughters of Saint Mary of Providence and, in various forms, the Guanellian*

*Cooperators*” (C 77) ... This is also an expressive sign of the universality of the Guanellian mission: the plurality of vocations: Priests and Brothers for the Servants of Charity, the Religious DSMP, the Guanellian laity in their various forms of cooperation and who belong to different countries can contribute express to the charism the richness of the different cultures from which they come.

In solidarity with the local Church

Our concrete way of serving the mission of the universal Church is to serve the particular churches where our apostolic communities are located.

By dedicating ourselves to bringing the ardor of charity where there is the greatest need, for our Guanellian vocation we are called to collaborate in the pastoral care of the local Churches, even in areas where it is more necessary to accompany the first proclamation of the Gospel with the witness of charity. And it is precisely in the diversity of situations of poverty that one can perceive the most urgent calls to be open to. It is fidelity to our mission that requires in us the ability to interpret the signs of the times and concrete circumstances to adapt our charitable apostolate to the local situation.

### **We are for the world**

*"It is necessary that the Works of Divine Providence do not live too much in themselves, but share their spirit as well as their action around them, because their nature is expansive and must take place not only within the walls of the Institute, but also in the cities and towns where the Institutes resides, striving to spread and arouse faith and charity everywhere ”* (Don L. Guanella).

Our life as religious is nourished by the social and cultural context in which we are inserted and with which we collaborate.

Certainly we recognize valid, especially today, the invitation that our Founder makes us to leave the sacristies to enter into a greater dialogue with culture in order to discern and support those values that correspond most to the Gospel and for the good of our neediest brethren. On the contrary, we must say that in society we have lost credibility in the secular skills, particularly in the professional and technical aspects required for our mission and in the managerial and administrative aspects required by the complexity of our Works and by the constant change that occurs in society.

In our relationship with the world today, on the one hand we are highly esteemed by the people for our social service, we must admit that we are not too sought after and followed as evangelizers and experts in the pastoral areas that most correspond to our charism.

Today the religious are no longer nearly the only ones to dedicate themselves to the poor, as they could have been at the time of our Founder and we must also recognize that society has made much progress in the field of social assistance, so much so that the necessary technical professional qualification is impossible on our part, and we certainly rely on the recruitment of competent lay people, in order to be able to dedicate ourselves with more evangelizing capacity to balance our work well in order to give enough 'Bread and Lord' to our poor and to the society to which we are sent.