# *1st October 2013*

*“A SINGLE TREE WITH MANY BRANCHES”: The Orionine Family 100 years after its first missionary step*

# A SINGLE TREE WITH MANY BRANCHES

**The Orionine Family 110 years after its first missionary step**

# Campocroce (Venice), 3rd September 2013

Dear Confreres,

*Deo gratias!*

I am writing this letter on the vigil of the centenary year of the departure of the first missionaries sent by Don Orione to Brazil. On the 17th December 1913, at 4pm precisely, the first Orionine missionaries left Genoa for Brazil on the shirp names “Tomaso di Savoia”. They disembarked at the port of Santos, on 29th December 1913 and reached their destination, Mar de Espanha, in the State of Minas Gerais, by train, on 2nd Janaury 1914.

That departure was the first opening of the Congregation outside the confines of Italy. It is an important date because it highlights the beginning of the embrace of all peoples in the name and spirit of Don Orione. The embrace of Don Orione reached many other nations after that. Today we are present in 32 nations.

This centenary year concerns the whole Orionine Family, in all the nations and in every category, FDP, PSMC, ISO, OLM/MLO and Lay people. Thus, just as the *Year of Faith* comes to an end the Little Work of Divine Providence celebrates the *Orionine Missionary Year*, from 20th October 2013 until 8th December 2014.[[1]](#endnote-1)

With the celebration of the *Orionine Missionary Year* let us make three resolutions:

1. to thank the Lord per the history of the Congregation which is in itself a history of mission;
2. to celebrate our common origiins and the unity of the Orionine Family in the world with a renewed commitment to creative fidelity to the Charism;
3. to revive the missionary ardour, an essential part of our Orionine identity, also in reply to the continuous appeals of Pope Francis for a “missionary Church”.

Every spiritual, public, personal, communitarian, congregational and civil moment will do good to us and to the people among whom we live. Let us religious celebrate the *Orionine Missionary Year* not only as a historic event to be remembered with external initiatives, but, above all, as an interior event, as a vocational reminder to return “to the sources” of the radicalness and centrality of Christ, of the Gospel, of charity and of the salvation of Souls.

Our identity is here, the glory of God, and our happiness is here – in holiness and mission and the salvation of Souls.

In this circular letter, entitled, *“A single tree with many branches”*, I aim to offer some suggestions for celebrating our common origins and the unity of the Orionine Family in the world so that it will be a stimulus for renewed commitment to creative fidelity to the charism.

At the beginning of this letter I cannot think of anything better than to quote an entire writing of Don Orione himself in which he presents the identity and mission of the Little Work of Divine Providence.[[2]](#endnote-2) It is a clear mirror in which we can see the face of Don Orione e our own face and religious men and women and lay people of today.

# THE LITTLE WORK OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

***What is it?***

It is a humble religious Congregation, modern in its men and in its systems, wholly and only consecrated to the good of the people and of the children of the people, trusting in Divine Providence.

Born for the poor, in order to achieve its aim it establishes itself in working-class centres, and preferably in the most wretched districts and suburbs on the outskirts of the great industrial cities. It lives poor among the little and poor people, mixing with humble workers, encouraged by the blessing of the Church and with substantial support of the authorities and of all those spirits are open to the new times, with great and generous hearts.

It goes to the people with more than words, with the example and holocaust of a life offered day and night with Christ, for the love and salvation of its brothers.

While living one single faith, and having one heart and soul and a single government, it develops many activities according to the various needs of men it meets, adapting, through the charity of Christ, to the different ethnic demands of the nations among which the hand of God has transplanted it.

***Its programme: charity***

It yearns to spread among the people the Gospel and the love for the *sweet Christ on earth,* as well as a livelier and greater spirit of fraternal charity among men. It is directed towards raising up the working classes, both religiously and socially, saving them from poor, fatal ideologies, and building up and uniting the people in Christ.

Its field is charity, without excluding truth and justice, but truth and justice done in charity.

The Little Work wants to serve and to serve with love. It intends, with the help of God, to carry out the works of mercy, in a practical way, for the moral and material relief of the poor.

Its life is to love, pray and educate orphans and the most abandoned children of the people in virtue and work: it is to suffer and sacrifice itself with Christ.

Its privilege is to serve Christ in the most abandoned and rejected poor.

Its cry is St Paul’s *“Charitas Christi urget nos”* (the love of Christ urges us on) and its programme is Dante’s *“Our charity closes no doors”.*

So it welcomes and embraces all who are in sorrow but have no one to give them bread, a roof or some comfort; it becomes all things to all men, to draw all men to Christ. Thus it comes from a lively throbbing of that love which is always alert and ready to all the needs of our suffering brothers. This little Work of Divine Providence wants to be almost a current of living, beneficial water which branches out its channels in order to irrigate the driest and most forgotten strata, and make them alive with Christ.

***It is a work of God***

It is a new plant which has emerged at the feet of the Church, in the garden of Italy, not through the work of man, but through a divine breath of the goodness of the Lord.

And it is developing from year to year, in the light and in the heat of God, to comfort thousands and thousands of bodies and spirits. **It is a single tree with various branches, all living with the same sap, all turned towards Heaven and flowering with love for God and men.**

This is, perhaps, the least among the works of faith and charity which have sprung from the heart of Jesus, but it wishes to be second to none in consuming itself in the love and service of the Church, of our country and of the people. Everything tells us that God alone has raised it up and is spreading it, in spite of our wretchedness, through extremely painful trials and even *per ignem et aquam* (though fire and water), sure of giving the help of faith to us men of little Faith.

***It is a work of faith***

In a time of positivism, of worldly greed and money, the Little Work of Divine Providence intends, therefore, under the patronage of the heavenly Virgin, to wipe away many tears, to raise minds and hearts to that God which is not of this world and which alone can fill and satisfy the heart of every man. It wishes to co-operate in a modest way, with great humility and kneeling at the feet of Rome, in keeping the people faithful or bringing them back to the Church and to country, and to save the little ones, the humble, those most led astray or our brothers in Christ who suffer most.

*Laus Deo! (Praised be God!).*

# II. THE ORIONINE CHARISM IS *CATHOLIC*

Don Orione states that that *“new unique plant”*, the Little Work of Divine Providence, which *“year by year is growing in the light and warmth of God, for the comfort of thousands and thousands of bodies and spirits”,* is *“the work of God”* and that *“it is only God who has brought it into being and is extending it, in spite of our nothingness”.* This was the understanding of Don Orione with regard to the *Little Work.*

We too, when we speak about Don Orione, about ourselves, about the Congregation, when we celebrate feasts or anniversaries, when we are together in assemblies, chapters, we must always start from this understanding: the charism, the Little Work of Divine Providence is *“the work of God”.* What a consolation and what a responsibility!

If, in 2013, we men and women Orionines can celebrate the centenary of the Little Work of Divine Providence, *a single tree with many branches,* as a *family,* with one spirit and mission from one side of the world to the other, it is because we are *“God’s work”,[[3]](#endnote-3) “given life by a single sap”,* from the charism that is *a spark of God”.*

In the centenary year in which we celebrate the opening out of our Congregation to all peoples with the sending of the first missionaries, I believe that it is useful to stop and consider the “holiness” and “catholicity” of the Orionine charism.

A *catholic* charism means a *universal* charism, *“of all and for all”,* like Jesus, like the Gospel and the Church, from which the charism comes and to which it is brought. The “catholicity” of a charism is one of the signs of its divine origin.[[4]](#endnote-4)

The Orionine charism has already proved its catholicity because it has been taken up by different peoples (more than thirty nations), has taken the form of vocations of different categories of persons (religious, priests, contemplatives, sisters, consecrated lay people, associates and individuals), and it has been capable of being incarnated in different eras of culture and history.[[5]](#endnote-5)

1. ***Catholic* because open to all peoples**

It often happens that I say that Don Orione was born Italian and died catholic, that is, universal. Don Orione was born in Italy and was always proud of his Italian origin. But then he spoke of *“Argentina, my second home”,* of *“Poland, beloved nation and very dear to me”,* and of *“Brazil, for whom what I have not been able to do during my lifetime I will do after my death”.* He did not say those things just to please people *(captatio benevolentiae)*, but because of his fatherly spirit.

The Orionine Congregation was also born in Italy and has become catholic, now present in many countries of the world. We cannot say whether it is more Italian or Agenginian, more Brazilian or Polish, more Spanish of Malgasy. No, it is catholic. That does not depend simply on the origin or number of members, but on the evangelical and catholic quality of the charism.

It is the same for each one of us. When the charism is adopted spiritually there develops and catholic openness, a drive towards communion open to all peoples. There are no strangers. *“We love our own counrty, and how! But all the world is home for the son of Divine Providence, who has Heaven for his homeland”,* wrote Don Orione.[[6]](#endnote-6) This is the result of charism of fraternity.

While celebrating the centenary of the “single tree with many branches”, let us remember that the catholic communion of the Orionine Family is above all the fruit of spiritual fidelity to the spirit of Don Orione, the charism, to the divine sap which gives it life.

1. ***Catholic because open to different eras and cultures***

The charism incarnates itself in history and is nourished, shaped and developed. The charism enter into dialogue with various social contexts and cultures which follow one another and it is re-expressed, with new difficulties and opportunities, adaptations and changes. It keeps its identity by renewing itself.

Don Orione faced various inculturations. The first inculturation of the charism came about in Italy regarding the “Roman Question”, that is, the separation between State and Church, the isolation of the Church, which was then overcome by the “out of the sacristy” movement and a new style and people-orietned action. Then there was the great flourishing of social action (until 1914, the beginning of the First World War), Don orione promoted a new way of being priests, *saints of the Church and of the health of society”. [[7]](#endnote-7)* He opened schools and agricultural settlements. Then, in the climate and conditions of the twenty years of fascism (1922-1943) Don Orione and the Congregation truned towards orphans, the poor, the most abandoned sections of society and then the Little Cottolengos were established.

After the death of the Founder in 1940, the charism had to face new and even more varied inculturations, while remaining true to itself, full of life and able to bear new fruits. Just to mention what happened in Italy, the Congregation, during the era of “social reconstruction” which followed the Second World War, lived its ecclesial charity towards the poorest, opening up to new needs with scores of institutions for orphans, war-wounded, people with disabilities, technical schools and houses for young workers. This era has now ended in present-day Italy.

At the beginning of the 21st Century, the main social and church questions are different. They are the sense of beloning to one world and globalisation, fragmentation and social and cultural *fluidity,* relativism and new global ethics, individualism and virtual communication and others. This is our world. *“Let us make the sign of the Cross and throw ourselves into the fire of today’s world”.[[8]](#endnote-8)* We need to think about a new inculturation of the charism in its spiritual and practical applications if we want the present time to have a real future.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Generations pass, cultures change and new models establish themselves. The Gospel lived by the Church has all it needs to remain alive and active. Also the evangelical charism lived by the Little Work of Divine Providence has within it the vitality of the things of God and *“We, although so little, must give our whole life”* for the salvation of *this* world of ours, which is loved by God and for which Christ has poured out his blood.

1. ***Catholic* because it is open to all sections of the People of God**

It is well known that right from the beginning of the foudation, Don Orione understood the *Work (Institute)*, which was growing with that spiritual impulse which he felt whithin him, was to be open to various sections of the People of God. In fact, from the very beginning Don Orione was followed and shared his “spirit” with men, women, religious, lay people, those of active life, contemplatives and married people.

When, on 21st March 1903, the diocesan canonical recognition of the *Little Work of Divine Providence* was given, this included the *Sons of Divine Providence,* religious *“distinguished in two classes, that of lay and that of priests”[[10]](#endnote-10)*and also those lay people who *“would have liked to make vows, if they were allowed”.[[11]](#endnote-11)* Don Orione described the *Little Work of Divine Providence* as a *“family of families”*, like *“a single tree with many branches”.[[12]](#endnote-12)*

# Then, in 1915, he started the female religious congregation of the *Little Missionary Sisters of Charity (PSMC), “a branch of the Little Work of Divine Providence”, [[13]](#endnote-13)* with the additional branch of the *Sacramentine non-seeing adorers,* founded in 1927.

Don Orione guided and formed many lay people as disciples. He gave them a valuble role in the institutions. He called them with in spiritual truth, *“sons”* and *“brothers”* and considered them members of the *“Little Work of Divine Providence”.* This referred to individual people and also groups like the *Ladies of Divine Providence* (1899), the *Subscribed and Adoptive Sons* which are mentioned in the Constitutions of 1904 and 1911[[14]](#endnote-14), the *Former Pupils* (1934) and the *Friends* (1940). Later on, when canon law allowed the *Orionine Secular Institute* (1959), while the lay people, Orionines of various types, are today co-ordinated in the *Orionine Lay Movement* (1997).

Having said that the Orionine charism is *catholic*, because it is a *“spark of the Holy Spirit”* and that the foundation *“is the work of God”*, and *“of Our Lady, Mother and Heavenly Foundress”,* as Don Orione used to add, then the question arises, can the charism dissappear? Can the *“single tree with many branches” ,* which is fed by the charism as a divine sap, cease to exist?

These are questions which lead us to be realistic and responsible. The charism is the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit in the consciences and hearts of both the Founder and his disciples. It is something which happens if we are docile to his work. Therefore,the strength and vitality of the charism depend on its holy origin, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, on the faithfulness to the charism of those who today inherit it, on the quality of their christian life, on their *holiness.*

# III. THE LITTLE WORK OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN THE WORLD

After having considered that the charism received and transmitted by Don Orione is Catholic, that is, open to all peoples, to all periods of history and to all types of person, let us switch our attention to the history and geography of its diffusion. There have already been conventions and studies which have tried to describe how this diffusion came about.

I think I can safely say that the expansion of the Little Work of Divine Providence in the world came about above all because of the vigour of the charism (and of those who live it), which implanted itself in many nations, making use of the interweaving of concrete historical conditions which brought together needs and gifts, limitations and possibilities, projects and “creativity of charity”.

Now, after 100 years, we see a certain overall plan, but the Little Work of Divine Providence in the world still looks like embroidery of which we can only see the back, that is, a rather chaotic confusion of threads. Seen from underneath, from the human point of view, the design of Divine Providence which organises, takes in hand, purifies and develops everything, is only decipherable from a series of lines or areas, more or less consistent and orderly, even though not everything is clear. The threads, the chief human characters of the design, meet, join together, each does his small part, often without even understanding why he is there. Some threads are cut and do not appear any more. Others are moved and appear in a completely different place and start again from scratch. Some threads are not enough to finish the design and so are knotted together with another similar thread, which will finish the work.

We can say something about the history of the expansion of the Little Work in the world, and we can also mention facts, people, places, events, dates and numbers. That helps to capture something of the plan of God and to praise the Hand of God which uses *“us poor rags of Divine Providence”,* knowing well that, *“where we rags and our nothingness end, there begins the infinite richness of Providence and our Heavenly Father, and our God!”[[15]](#endnote-15)*

1. **Orionine Missionary pre-history**

We begin the missionary history of the Little Work of Divine Providence on the date of 17th December 1913, the day of the departure of the first missionaries for Brazil from the port of Genoa. We are now celebrating the centenary of it. But really, that historic event was prepared for by many other spiritual events and concrete facts of Don Orione and his first followers.

Don Orione himself recognised the first event of our missionary pre-history, as his well-known **dream of *“Our Lady of the Blue Mantle”,*** while still a young seminarian, after the closure of his youth centre in Tortona, in July 1893. Don Orione gathered from that dream a clear indication of missions *“ad gentes”.* He saw that great mantle of Our Lady that *“continued to grow, so that you could no longer see the borders”, “that covered everything and all as far as the distant horizon”, “children of many different colours, whose number was increasing in an extraordinary way...Our Lady turned towards me and pointed to them”.* Then writing to Bishop Bandi, he added clearly,

*“As I remembered that there was no border, and that there were various colours, I understood that they were the missions, and I understood in a moment of prayer, as if in an unexpected flash of light, that Our Lord had sent me”.[[16]](#endnote-16)*

Also in the letter of 4th April 1897 to his friend and future cardinal, Fr Carlo Perosi, he wrote, *“I feel that I need to run throughout the earth and through all the seas and I think that the immense charity of Our Lord Jesus will give life to all the lands and all the seas and all will call Jesus Christ”.* He was 25 years old.

This was not just a poetic outburst. In fact, Don Orione crossed the sea, during his **journey of 1898 to Sicily,** “far”, not only geographically, from his Piedmont.[[17]](#endnote-17) At 26 years of age, it was his first great journey with missionary aims and desires.[[18]](#endnote-18)

In the **“Plan and programme of the Little Work”**, presented on **11th February 1903** to H.E. Igino Bandi, bishop of Tortona, Don Orione presents a project, or better, his missionary availability for anything. In n. 4 Don Orione declares himself ready *“with the help of Divine Grace, to follow always the orders and desires which He (the Pope) will deign to express for any part of the world”* and in n. 5, *“The Work of Divine Providence...is ready to go wherever the Holy Father is pleased to send it”.* He does not present a human expansion project, but he puts himself in the hands of the Church and of Providence for their plans of salvation for souls.

The missionary history *ad gentes* of Don Orione matured in his heart and will, before the facts and the journeys, in prayer before there were any specific plans. In this context, two other significant events should be place.

In **1905**, having been invited with insistence to go to Brazil, **he writes to Mother Michel Grillo**, *“I am ready to go to Brazil when that is necessary for the glory of God. I do not know the language, I know nothing, but charity speaks just one language and all languages...I do not think that we should abandon America, but we should save it. I will be very happy and will bless the Lord on the day in which Divine Providence will lead me to pitch tents in Brazil”. [[19]](#endnote-19)*

In **1908**, he had his **first mission *“in the Roman Patagonia, outside the gate of San Giovanni”***. The event can be told as a pious story, but it was a real mission. Don Orione had gone to the Pope to offer himself for a “mission” and Pius X asked him to go to the outskirts of Rome outside St. John’s gate which, at the beginning of the 1900’s, was considered real mission because of poverty and desolation, in need of evangelisation and moral uplift: *“That is your Patagonia! Everything is needed there”.* When we look at how Don Orione behaved and started that mission, we can see that he used a missionary methodology which unites worship with charitable activities. On 25th March 1908, the first poor chapel was inaugurated. Then in 1914 an orphanage was opened and then the “San Filippo” School, and then the great and beautiful church of Ognissanti. It is the classical development of a mission “ad gentes” which is repeated even today in many of our missions.

We have now come to 1913, when the first Orionine mission outside of Italy started. On **17th December 1913 the first missionaries departed for Brazil.**

The first missionary tent was pitched in Brazil at Mar de Espanha, on 2nd January 1914. It was a first small expedition. From the port of Genoa Fr Carlo Dondero, the religious Brother Carlo Germanò, and Mr. Giulio, a layman set sail.[[20]](#endnote-20)

I have had the privilege of visiting the humble house of the beginnings at Mar de Espanha, in the state of Minas Gerais. It has been preserved as in the times of the first missionaries and the presence of Don Orione. It was a first humble beginning.

1. **Don Orione missionary**

Not only was the Little Work missionary from its very beginning, but it had a missionary founder. Don Orione was a missionary by nature and gave a missionary drive to the Congregation. He made two journeys in Latin America, with considerably long stays (4th August 1921 – 4th July 1922 and 24th September 1934 – 24th August 1937) visiting Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile.

It is always amazes me the fact that he went to Latin America when the Congregation was not yet solid in number and organisation. There was still a great shortage of much needed personnel: there were 16 houses and only 31 priests, 20 seminarians, 5 hermits and 2 lay brothers.

From the humble missionary beginnings of our Congregation we can deduce two valid messages for us today, at a distance of 100 years. The first is that the mission *ad gentes* is an essential ingredient of the constitution of the Congregation right from the beginning. The second is that Don Orione did not begin the mission because the Congregation had developed; he sent out the mission in order to develop the Congregation.[[21]](#endnote-21)

In the climate of the *Orionine Missionary Year* which celebrates the unity and the mission of the Little Work of Divine Providence in the world, I dedicate the second part of the Letter to recording at least the year and the beginning of the foundation of the Orionine Family in each nation. It will be an opportunity for all to have a historical and geographical tour to know our dear Orionine Family.

1. **The Congregation in mission**

ITALY (1893)

The birthday of the Congregation is considered to be 15th October 1893, the day of the opening of the College of San Bernardino, its first house, with its own activity and funds, with the seminarian Orione as superior and directly responsible for it. This first shoot already had latent in it the *“one plant with many branches”* which developed in Italy with many houses and activities of the present and representative Orionine Family with all its components: Sons of Divine Providence (priests, brothers, hermits), Little Missionary Sisters of Charity (active and adorers of the Blessed Sacrament), Secular Institute and Lay Movement with many associations of yesterday and today.

BRAZIL (1914)

It is the first country outside of Italy which the Orionines went to. The date of foundation of the Congregation in Brazil is considered to be 2nd January 1914, the day on which the first missionaries, who having departed from Genoa on 17th December, reached Mar de Espanha by train coming from the port of Santos. The first house was opened on following 11th February and was dedicated to Our Lady Immaculate of Lourdes. In this house, Don Orione arrived later on 28th August 1921 and remained there for some time carrying out typical missionary work. The activities started to develop above all during the second visit of Don Orione in 1934-1937. The Little Missionary Sisters of Charity arrived in 1937. The Congregation grew to the extent of the present-day two provinces of the FDP and one of the PSMC.

ARGENTINA (1921)

If we consider the arrival of Don Orione in Argentina, then the date is 13th November 1921, when he reached Buenos Aires, as a guest of the Redemptorists in Calle Paraguay, 1204. But the first house of the Congregation, at Victoria, was opened on 12th February 1922, in the presence of Don Orione who celebrated Mass in the church dedicated to “Our Lady of Safe-keeping” (N.S. della Guardia). Then the developments were many, especially through the drive of Don Orione during his second stay in the years 1934-1937. Also the PSMC who arrived in 1930 blossomed greatly. Argentina, much loved by Don Orione, is today one of the countries where the presence of the Orionine Family in all its components is most significant.

PALESTINA (1921)

In August 1921, Don Orione, was invited by the Patriarch of Gerusalemme, H.B. Barlassina, and sent Fr Adaglio, Hermit Giuseppe and the seminarian Gismondi to take over the agricultural settlement of Rafat, in the valley of Sorek. In May 1925, an agricultural settlement and a church were opened at Capernaum. Various problems led to the withdrawal from Rafat in 1927 and from Capernaum in 1931.

POLAND (1923)

After having contacts with Polish priests in Rome, Don Orione sent Fr Aleksander Chwilowicz to Poland in January 1923 and he was followed by Fr Biagio Marabotto. An important date at the beginning in Poland is 29th January, when the bishop of Wloclawek gave permission to the Little Work to build its own house at Zdunska Wola and to carry out its own apostolate. In 1940 Orionine Poland became a province. Almost immediately began the formation of a small group of vocations of girls, such that on 8th December 1929 some of them began their novitiate as Little Missionary Sisters of Charity at Tortona. Poland today is also developed with various “branches” of the Orionine Family.

RHODES (1925)

The pioneer of Rhodes was Fr Bruno Camillo. On 14th September 1925 the orphanage “Cavalieri di Malta” was opened at Acandia. Various confreres succeeded one another here and at the nearby agricultural settlement “Casa dei Pini”. Because of a changing political situation the hospice of Acandia was handed over to Greek ownership in 1948, and then in 1949 Fr Gismondi, the last Orionine religious in Rhodes, left with the few remaining orphans for Italy.

URUGUAY (1929)

Don Orione made one stop at the port of Montevideo in 1921, before being able to reach Buenos Aires. For bureaucratic reasons he stayed for some days and Don Orione used them to make contact with the bishop and other persons in the city.

However, the date of the beginning of the Congregation is 1929 when, in response to the request of Archbishop Aragone, Don Orione sent Fr Giuseppe Montagna, Fr Vincenzo Errani and Fr Francesco Castagnetti to Montevideo. They stayed in a property donated by Mrs. Bonello de Aguerre and started a social work. ON 20th November 1930, the archbishop authorised the foundation of the house at La Floresta. In 1934 Fr Pietro Migliore took charge of the parish of “San Carlo” in Montevideo. In 1961 the Little Cottolengo was started. The PSMC arrived in Montevideo in 1933. They set up house there and worked in the diocesan seminary. Then they transferred to La Floresta and in 1946 they started the Little Cottolengo of Montevideo for ladies.

SPAIN (1930)

The first opening of the Congregation in Spain was as a result of a direct decision of Don Orione, when in 1930, he sent Fr Ricardo Gil Barcelòn. Together with postulant Antonio Arrué Peiró he was killed in hatred for the faith at Valencia on 3rd August 1936.

After the first Orionine presence was so dramatically wiped out, it was necessary to wait until the end of the World War and the reorganisation of the Congregation before a new seat in Spain was established. The initiators were the Spanish Fr Martino Remis and the Italian Fr Lorenzo who arrived in 1955. They began with a “search for vocations”; and, on 13th October 1956, the first house at Posada de Llanes was opened. In 1957 there followed the openings at Dicastillo and Cascante and, later, in 1966, at Fromista, in 1967 at Madrid and 1980 at Valencia-Manises.

USA (1934)

After making first contacts with Bishop Chartrand, bishop of Indianapolis, who then welcomed the Little Work into his territory with a letter of November 1933, Don Orione sent the enterprising Fr Aleksander Chwilowicz to the United States of America, followed by Fr Ottavi and Fr Michalski. Having obtained an old Benedictine monastery at Jasper, Indiana, they transformed it into a “Divine Providence Home” for the elderly and poor.

At Boston, in 1953, there was the opening of the “Don Orione Home” next door to which was built the shrine of “Mary Queen of the Universe”, with the beautiful statue of Our Lady of Arigo Minerbi. Further developments followed at Bradford and New York.

ENGLAND (1935)

After an exploratory visit in 1935 by Fr Gaetano Piccinini, the first Orionine priest to arrive in Great Britain was Fr Adriano Calegari, followed by Fr Luciano Pesce Maineri, to carry out an apostolate among Italian immigrants. The residence was at Swansea, the second city of Wales. The presence was interrupted by the Second World War, and was restored by Fr Paolo Bidone in April 1949 with the opening of Fatima House in London.

ALBANIA (1936)

In October 1936, our presence started in Albania with Fr Sante Gemelli and Fr Giulio Spada, at Shjiak. Then there followed an orphanage at Scutari (1939), a farm at Bushati and the parish of Kalimeti. In a situation of religious persecution, the Congregation was forced to leave Albania on 20th January 1946. We returned on 18th October 1992, setting up at Elbasan, Shiroka and Bardhaj.

VATICAN CITY (1940)

In 1940, the Orionine Congregation was entrusted with the Telephone service and afterwards the Vatican Post Office. Don Orione himself carefully prepared the beginning of this activity sending the first 5 religious: *“Felice Bortignon, Giuseppe Contoli, Giovanni Dalla Libera, Raraele Mattei and Francesco Scarsoglio. They are good sons who will give good example and edification”.* They began their service on 1st February 1940. The religious community resides at present in the Vatican City and manages the Post and Telegraph Office.

CHILE (1942)

Don Orione arrived there in a courageous aeroplane flight across the Andes and stayed there from 30th January to 9th February 1936. But the real beginning was on 12th May 1942 with the arrival in Santiago of Fr José Zanocchi, Fr Gino Carradori and Fr Raul Morlupi. In the following year we bought the property at Los Cerillos on which were built a school, a Little Cottolengo and a parish. Almost immediately the PSMC arrived. There followed new centres at Quintero, Los Angeles and Rancagua.

SWITZERLAND (1951)

In Switzerland we arrived in 1951, in a residence in Lopagno, in the Canton of Ticino. It was transformed into a residential house for people with intellectual disability. The PSMC worked together with us until the end of the 1980’s. The community left the house at Lopagno in 2008, but the activity continues.

FRANCE (1952)

The first Orinonines to settle in France were Fr Antonio Pilotto and Fr Giovanni Sari. It was on 11th February 1952. In France there were small presences a Casseneuil (1952-1958), then at Saint Ouen (1956-1993), Plailly (1978-1992), Annecy and Persan without ever reaching a sufficient level of development for vocations and activities.

AUSTRALIA (1959)

In Australia some Polish confreres dedicated themselves to the apostolate among the Polish emigrants. Fr Wlodzmierz Michalski arrived in 1959 and Fr Stanislaw Antoniewicz in 1963. They worked from St Patrick’s College, Strathfield. It was always a rather meagre presence and not organised in communities and religious works. The final withdrawal took place in 1999.

THE IVORY COAST (1971)

After the first explorative contacts, the Congregation was officially in the Ivory Coast from 1971, when the parish of Bonoua was entrusted to Fr Angelo Mugnai and Fr Marino Collina. At present there are 4 communities at Bonoua, 2 at Anyama, and 1 at Korhogo with many pastoral and charitable activities, the shrine of Our Lady of Safe-keeping (Madonna della Guardia) and a good number of young Ivorian religious. The PSMC arrived in the Ivory Coast on 20th November 19996 with a community at Anyama.

IRELAND (1972)

After the first contacts by Fr Paolo Bidone for an opening in Dublin, the first religious to live there were Fr Vittorio Muzzin and Fr Giuseppe Vallauri in September 1972, while studying at the Catholic University of Dublin. Sarsfield House at Ballyfermot was opened in May 1973 and became a family-style residence for boys with social and justice problems.

PARAGUAY (1976)

On 1st August 1976 Bishop Ramòn Pastor Bogarìn Argana welcomed the first Orionine priest, Fr Angelo Pellizzari. Soon afterwards Fr Luis Cacciutto joined him and the pastoral care of Ità Corà was taken on. Then the vast pastoral area of Neembucù Sur, including 4 parishes with 43 little communities was included. A second community was opened at Mariano Roque Alonso, on the outskirts of the capital Asunciòn, and today this looks after the Little Cottolengo (1988) and the “Sagrada Familia (Holy Family)” parish. On 19th March 1983, the PSMC joined the mission.

MADAGASCAR (1976)

On 11th November 1976 Fr Agostino Casarin and Fr Pietro Vazzoler, the pioneers, set foot in Madagascar and took over the pastoral centre of Anatihazo. In 1989, Antsofinondry was opened with the pastoral care of the district of Namehana. In 1991 we went to Faratsiho, a district centre with a parish as big as a diocese. In September 2013, the latest opening is at Ambanja, on the northern coast of the Red Island. The PSMC arrived in Madagascar on 1st January 1988 and had flourishing vocations and activities.

CAPE VERDE (1978)

The Little Missionary Sisters of Charity arrived there on 8th February 1978 and began their first community at Santo Antào and then another at Praia, two islands of the Cape Verde Archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean. The Sons of Divine Providence took residence, however, on the Island of Sal (Sal) with the arrival of Fr Aparecido da Silva and a young religious seminarian on 28th January 1988.

KENYA (1979)

The Little Missionary Sisters of Charity began in Kenya at Igoji in 1979. The following year the Sacramentine Sisters joined them. New charitable activities were opened at Mugoiri and Meru. The Sons of Divine Providence reached there in October 1996, with Fr Giuseppe Vallauri and established a small house at *Lang’ata,* on the outskirts of the city of Nairobi, where the seminary began. At Kaburugi and Kandisi we are present with parishes and activities for disabled people in rural areas.

TOGO (1981)

Our presence goes back to the beginning of 1981, in Agadji (Diocese of Atakpamé), where we remained until July 1988. In 1987 we accepted from the Diocese of Dapaong a small centre for people with disabilities in the North at Bombouaka (1988) and the pastoral care of the parish of Bogou (1989). The first confreres to work in Togo were Fr Giuseppe Bonsanto, Fr Armando Corrado and Fr Antonio Ieranò. In 2002 a new community with a parish was started at Baga. On 5th March 2009 the PSMC also opened a community at Bombouaka. In September of this year a new presence begins at Lomé, the capital.

GERMANY (1984)

On 23rd September 1984, in the cathedral of Mainz, Archbishop Karl Lehmann, embraced and welcomed Fr Stefano Ongari, as the new “missionary” of the Italian Catholic community in the diocese. The following year Fr Elvezio Baroni joined him and then moved to Russelsheim. The Congregation finally left Germany on 21st February 1998.

JORDAN (1984)

Fr Giuseppe Tirello and Fr Philip Kehoe reached Zarqa in 1984. They had a piece of land on the edge of the town in the desert. They started a little village, with St Joseph’s Technical Training Centre (19th October 1986), the house for religious, the pilgrims’ hostel and the beautiful shrine of *“Our Lady, Queen of Peace”,* built to fulfil a vow after the war of 1991.

VENEZUELA (1987)

Fr Italo Saràn arrived in Barquisimeto from Brazil on 13th June 1987 to take over an already existing institution for people with disabilities. Immediately afterwards the archbishop entrusted to us the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The activities were well established when the tragic road accident happened in which Fr Italo Saràn, Fr Masiero, Fr Riva and the young volunteer Raffael Villanueva lost their lives (25th October 1991). The mission was then entrusted to the Province of Spain. In 1993 a new community was opened at Carabellada with a parish and various social works.

BELARUS (1990)

After the fall of soviet communism in 1989, during Lent of 19990, Fr Zygmunt Ryzko, Fr Jòsef Wojciechowski and Fr Stanislaw Pawlina went to Belarus to do pastoral work in the district around the shrine of Lahiszyn and in the diocese of Pinsk. In the autumn of 1990, with the arrival in Lahiszyn of Fr Miroslaw Zlobinski as parish priest and helper in the cathedral of Pinsk, a stable presence of the Orionines in Belarus began. It then branched out with pastoral activities at Kobryn, Iwanawa and Drohiczyn and the opening of the house of charity for elderly and poor people.

THE PHILIPPINES (1991)

Don Orione had already thought about it such that in 1937 he wrote, *“I am already promised but not yet concluded to start a mission in the Philippines, where the bishop told me that there is great need and great poverty”.* But historical date to remember is 5th October 1991, when the first Orionines arrived in the Philippines, namely, Fr Luigi Piccoli, Fr Oreste Ferrari and two lay people. On 12th January 1992 the new parish, *“Mother of Divine Providence”,* in the difficult district of *Payatas*, on the outskirts of Manila, was entrusted to them. Later the Little Cottolengo and the seminary were started at Montalban, followed by the new mission in Lucena. The PSMC began their presence in the Philippines with the arrival of the first three sisters in Manila on 28th January 2004.

RUMANIA (1991)

The history of the Congregation of Don Orione in Rumania begins just after the fall of the Berlin wall and communism (1989). After some visits in 1990 the first Orionine priest, Fr Luigi Tibaldo, set up in Oradea, in Transylvania, on 19th June 1991. Today the Orionine presence has extended to Iasi and Voluntari, in the outskirts of Bucharest. The PSMC opened their first community a Voluntari in 1999.

MEXICO (1994)

After the exploratory visit of Fr Rinaldo Rodella in July 1993 the Orionines were entrusted with the pastoral centre at Nezahualcoyotl, in a poor suburb of Mexico City. The first three Orionines arrived here in 1994 and took over the care of the “N.S. de Talpa” parish, the “Vasconcellos” school and other social care activities, to which was added in 1997 the “Hogar Caridad”. A second community, at Amecameca, then opened a Little Cottolengo (2002) and took over the parish of Xoyatzingo

RUSSIA (1992)

The Little Missionary Sisters of Charity began their mission in 1992 in the parish of the Immaculate Conception at Smolensk, about 400 km to the west of Moscow, providing the work of catechesis and care of the sick in families until 2010 when the left Russia.

PERU (1993)

The Little Missionary Sisters of Charity arrived at La Portada di Manchay, on the outskirts of the great city of Lima in 1993, carrying out pastoral activities and running nursery school.

UKRAINE (1994)

The Little Missionary Sisters of Charity arrived first at Kowel (1994) and then at Charkiv (1996). The Sons of Divine Providence first settled a Leopoli (Lv’viv) on 16th October 2001 in an apartment at Via Perkarska, 11. The pioneers are Fr Egidio Montanari and Fr Moreno Cattelan who entered into the Greek Rite of the Catholic Church. A parish and a centre for charitable activities were inaugurated on 25th May 2009 in a working-class area of Leopoli.

BURKINA FASO (1999)

In September 1999 Fr Giuseppe Bonsanto was invited to Ouagadougou to open a house of formation which was inaugurated in 2002, and a rehabilitation centre which was completed in 2004. More recently, on 20th November 2010, a new community set up house in Tampellin, with a dispensary and pastoral activity among the poor villages of the savannah.

INDIA (2001)

After several exploratory visits and contacts, the Orionine established themselves with the arrival of Fr Oreste Ferrari in March 2002. Already on following 15th June the first 9 seminarians were received and in March 2004 the seminary *“Maria Sadan”* was opened in Bangalore (Bengaluru). Following that we reached Kollam (2nd August 2009) and Warangal (26th June 2012).

MOZAMBIQUE (2003)

The beginnings in Mozambique coincided with the date of the centenary of the diocesan approval of the Little Work of Divine Providence, 21st March 2003. The first religious there were Fr José Geraldo da Silva and Fr Suvenir Miotelli. On 14th April of the same year, the parish of *Bagamoyo* was entrusted to them in a poor suburb of the capital Maputo. The beginning of the centre for disabled people, *Benfica,* is due to the work of Fr Romolo Mariani.

There are other nations to which the Congregation was sent and in which it was present for a short period, such as *Austria, Portugal and South Korea.[[22]](#endnote-22)*

# IV. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“You do not only have a glorious past to remember and to tell but a great future to create! Look to the future in which the Spirit is sending you to great more things with you”. The words of John Paul II, in *Vita Consacrata* 110, call us to be realistic about the future. What guidelines for the future can we extract from this centenary year of the mission and unity of the Orionine Family?

1. We must recognise that the unity of the Orionine Family and creative fidelity to the charism are essential conditions for the growth and development of the Little Work of Divine Providence. Being faithful and united is what we can do. The rest is *“God’s work”.*
2. We can be sure that the *Charism* will not fail because it is a shoot, a spark of the Gospel and of the life of the Church. However, we must keep in mind that the *Congregation* will not fail if unity and fidelity to the charism which gives it life is not lacking. This is a great responsibility.
3. In our Congregation, the “ad gentes” *missionary thrust* and the “*out of the sacristy”* apostolic zeal wherever we are what give us vitality. Fire, especially that spiritual, vocational and charismatic type keeps burning when it is spread. It would be fatal to gamble with words or “to look at ourselves in the mirror” without putting our resources in the mission, in the *“charity which alone will save the world”.* The fire would go out. We would become “an ONG or self-serving association, to use the words of Pope Francis.
4. From the missionary history of these past 100 years we can be convinced that the mission makes the Congregation grow and keeps it good health and each of its members. Where the missionary thrust is dying out single institutions or entire provinces enter into a process of introversion and starvation.

*“Go to the existential frontiers with courage”,* the then Cardinal Bergoglio exhorted us in 2009. *“God wants you to be “callejeros (men who spend time among the people)” in the street. Saint Pius X invited Don Orione to go outside of St John’s gate, in the street, not in the sacristy. A Congregation which looks at itself in the mirror ends up in narcissism and finishes by being without the ability to attract, without dreams. A congregation which closes itself in its “little things” ends up like all “little things” by being closed, thrown away, with a musty smell, useless and sick. The sure road to spiritual sickness is living closed in “little things”. A congregation which goes out onto the street runs the risk, the risk of everyone who goes into the street, of having an accident. Ask God a thousand times the grace to be a congregation which has accidents and not a sick congregation”[[23]](#endnote-23)*

, Dear Confreres, I am coming to the close of this letter which has the aim of leading us to reflect and to be committed, at the beginning of this *Orionine Missionary Year.* May we continue to reflect in our hearts and in our communities. It will continue in the up-coming General Assembly of verification which will see Confreres representing all the Provinces united at Aparecida (Brazil) from 13th to 20th October next.

During the celebration of 20th October, at the Marian Shrine of Aparecida, a reliquary con the “blood of Don Orione”, as a sign of the beginning of the Missionary Year, will be presented and will begin a pilgrimage starting from Brazil and then to all the nations where we are. It is meant to show that the blood of Don Orione, his spiritual charism, unites and gives life to that mystical body which is the Congregation and the entire Orionine Family in the world.

**United in prayer**

During these last few months our Confreres, Fr Ferdinando Carlo Dall’Ovo, Fr Remo Biasi, Fr Antonio Carboni and Fr Michele Zaccaro has departed from us and we entrust them to the Lord.

Also the following have died: Sr Maria Branca, Sr Maria Afra Menegati, Sr Maria Gloria Crucis, Sr Maria Angelo Vilanski, Sr Maria Illuminata, Sr Maria Carolina Castelli, Sr Maria Natalizia, Sr Maria Asuncion and Sr Maria Livia. Concetta Giallongo, the former person in charge of the Orionine Secular Institute has also returned to the Lord. She is also well-deserves our gratitude for the service she gave as a volunteer in the Curia and to me personally.

Among our relatives I have been informed of the death of the father of Fr Ernesto Gabriel Lopez, the mother of Fr Bernardo Young-Tae Seo and of Fr Roberto Anonis, the brother of Br Marcio Alexandre Calais Jesus and of Fr Antonio Casarin, the sister of Fr Raphael Caldeira Bareto and of Mrs. Clelia, sister of the Frs Rocco and Stanislao Tonoli. Let us pray for them all with thanksgiving.

I ask for prayers for the forth-coming General Assembly of verification, from 13th to 20th October at Aparecida in Brazil.

ON 13th October, at Tarragona in Spain, our two martyrs Fr Ricardo Gil Barcelón and postulant Antonio Arrué Peiró will be beatified. I invite you to read their biography, already in Italian and Spanish and soon in English and to remember them in celebrations in all our communities.

From 4th to 15th November next, at Montebello, there will be a short course of formation on the charism for formators coming for the Orionine world.

Finally a prayer for all our sick ones: May the find in the Risen Lord comfort and hope and in all of us that concrete and loving charity which lessens suffering and increases the family spirit, so dear to our Founder.

I remember you all to the Lord and wish that the blessed smile of Saint Luigi Orione and of Our Blessed Lay may be upon you all.

Fr Flavio Peloso FDP

(*Superior General)*

1. Please see the complementary letter *“Announcing the missionary year”*, signed by the Superiors General of the Sons of Divine Providence and the Little Missionary Sisters of Charity. The inauguration will take place at the Marian Shrine of Aparecida, in Brazil, on 20th October next, in the context of the pilgrimage of the Orionine Family in Brazil and at the end of the General Assembly of the Sons of Divine Providence and will witness a vast gathering of Confreres, Consoeurs and Orionine Lay People. The conclusion will coincide with the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. From a writing of 1938, In the footsteps of Don Orione, pp. 259-260. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The Church, by intervening with its approval, has put its seal that at the origin of the « work » is a recognisable intervention of the Lord that the mission which the institute has adopted comes from God. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. It must always be remembered that the Orionine charism is not simply *ministerial* (for a particular ministry in the Church) but eminently *Christological – evangelical,* that is, “something new” for a specific way of living the following of Christ, both as a way of holiness and as a way of mission. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The theme is beginning to be a subject of quite a lot of study ; see, for example, in [*Don Orione e il Novecento*](http://www.host-lime.com/do/messaggi/articolo.asp?ID=389) (Atti del Convegno di Studi, Rome 1-3 marzo 2002, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2003) i contributi di G. Canestri, *Don Orione incontra l’Italia*, 99-114; A. S. Bogaz, [*Don Orione incontra il Brasile*](http://www.host-lime.com/do/messaggi/articolo.asp?ID=657), 115-140; E. Giustozzi, *Don Orione in Argentina*, 143-160; A. Weiss, *Don Orione incontra la Polonia*, 161-178; R. Simionato, *Ragioni e atteggiamenti dell’abbraccio dei popoli*, 179-198. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Letter of 20th August 1920, *Lettere I, p. 248.* [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *« We must be saints, but saints whose holiness should not only be that of the worship of the faithful, nor just in Church, but which goes beyond and brings to society such splendour and light, such life of love of God and of men and women that they are saints of the \_Church and saints of the health of society”; in the footsteps of Don Orione,* p. 188*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. *Scritti* 75,242. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. I have launched a reflection on this subject, which I hope will be taken up in the next General Chapter, in the circular letter For a here and now leading to the future. Inculturation of the charism in a Congregation which is changing: *Atti e comunicazioni* 2011, n. 236, pp. 223-238. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. *Plan and programme…*cit. *Letters* Vol. I p. 6 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. In the First hand-written Constitutions of 1904, at n. 7 it is said that such lay people *should be considered as adopted Sons....and should be called Subscribed to the Institute, or Tertiaries”.* [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Cf. F. Peloso, *Alcune questioni sulle origini della Piccola Opera della Divina Provvidenza*, “Messaggi di Don Orione”, 35 (2003) n. 110, pp. 39-61. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Don Orione presented several times the *Little Missionary Sisters of Charity as “our sisters”*, *“part”* and *“branch* “obviously not of the Sons of Divine Providence but of the *Little Work of Divine Providence;” the aim of the sisters is the same as ours”.* I refer you to the article already quoted,: *Alcune questioni sulle origini della Piccola Opera della Divina Provvidenza.* [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. hand-written Constitutions of 1904, n. 7; printed Constitutions of 1912, n.11. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. *Scritti* 69, 320. Don Orione had some problems because of this humble way of thinking and speaking about himself and the Congregation. There were some who were more concerned about the appearance than about the substance. We know that the Apostolic Visitor, Abbot Emanuele Caronti, was sent in 1934 “to put the Congregation in order”. Don Orione writes thus to Fr Sterpi, “*This morning he (*the *Visitor*) *was summoned to the Religious (*the Congregation of the Holy See) *because of an article which has appeared in the* Corriere della Domenica, *where it says that I myself call our Congregation “a great mess”. He asked me if it is true. I replied yes, and that I say it especially to the Bishops and to the Church so that they may not be deceived by me and to our priests and students so that they do not become proud if Divine Providence uses us rags to do some good, not because we want to make a mess of things”;* letter of 12-01-1939, *Scritti 19, 309.* [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. *Scritti* 45, 60. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. He set sail from Genoa on 14th September in the evening, on board the « Persia ». *“We embarked at Genoa for Syracuse. We slept on the rigging, outside, under starlight, stopping at Livorno, Naples and Messina” (Annali* II, 374). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. This is the interpretation given by Don Orione, *“Then (at Don Bosco’s) we dreamt only of seas to cross and souls to save...Now finally the seas have come and an angel (Bishop Blandini) is calling me to save souls in the name of the Lord!”* To his bishop of Tortona he writes, *“I am going to search for souls to bring to the Heart of Jesus”.* DOPO II, 372-373. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. *In the footsteps of Don Orione,* p. 215. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Fr Carlo Dondero was born at Genoa on 5th November 1884 and he became the superior at the San Romolo College. Br. Carlo Germanò was an orphan from Calabria. Mr. Giulio was a trusted man who came from San Romolo College like Fr Dondero. On 6th June 1914 Fr Angelo de Paoli, born in Pavia, on 11th August 1885, also left for Mar de Espanha. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. For a synthetic description of the development of the Congregation in the world I refer to the circular letter Fino agli estremi confini della terra. *L’impegno missionario delle Famiglia Orionina* in “Atti e comunicazioni” 2005, n. 218, p. 243-271. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. The beginning in *Austria* was with Fr Carlo Mertelj in 1968, in the diocese of Klagenfurt. He gave personal pastoral help for some years, without the presence of a community. In *Portugal* a house for refugee boys from Angola was offered to us 30km from Lisbon in 1975. Fr Tarcisio Lovo did not take up residence as the promised conditions were not fulfilled. The opening in *South Korea* had been desired and prepared and two Korean confreres went there. On 2nd February 2010 a contract was signed with the bishop of Changwon and the Orionine presence began with a commitment to the diocesan centre for immigrants. The joint project ended on 1st June 2011because the activity of the centre ended and one of the Korean confreres abandoned the Congregation. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Il messaggio del Card. Bergoglio (the message of Cardinal Bergoglio) is published in « Atti e comunicazioni », 2013, n.67, pp. 103-105. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)