

# THE ORIONINE FAMILY ON THE JOURNEY IN THE CHURCH OF POPE FRANCIS

Sant'Alberto di Butrio, 29th December 2013

My very dear confreres

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*Deo gratias!*

I am writing this letter during the Christmas season, whilst having a moment of prayer and reflection in the hermitage of Sant'Alberto di Butrio.

The year which saw the change over from Pope Benedict who resigned for health reasons "*ingravescente aetate*" (advancing age), to Pope Francis is coming to an end. Pope Francis is giving a new style and impulse not only to the "Petrine service" of the bishop of Rome but also to the life and mission of the Church.

Our very own General Assembly, which was verifying concrete objectives of the decisions taken at the General Chapter in 2010, had something of the 'climate of Pope Francis'. In my introductory report I said that his examples and teachings "should inspire the revision we are making of our journey as a congregation" observing that 'we have an inheritance of a style and values expressed in the continuous appeals of Pope Francis'.

Dear confreres, in this circular letter I intend to share some reflections on what it means for us to be "*Orionines on a journey in the Church of Pope Francis*". Already the title says something about the perspective and the practical leaning to which we are called. Let it be clear: The Church belongs to Jesus Christ, it is his body (Col 1:24) led by the Holy Spirit. The Church does not belong to Paul or Apollo, or Paul VI, or John Paul II or anybody else. *The Church of Pope Francis means the pontificate of Pope Francis, or the Church of the new step in the journey of the coming years*" (*Evangelii gaudium* 1).

## **A conversation with Pope Francis that lasted three hours**

**I was one of the 120 Superiors General of male Orders and Congregations, which on the 29th November last had the grace to spend a whole morning from 9.30-12.30 with Pope Francis in the synod hall in the Vatican.** It was a long brotherly and fatherly cordial gathering. Any distance was immediately dissolved by the first greeting, and the jokes at the beginning. We had before us a Pope who spoke with confidence, and was able to recount his experiences, who gave guidelines and encouragement to carry out the task of being the animators of consecrated life. We had a 'first-hand experience' of what the evangelical leadership of Pope Francis is. Everyone who writes and speaks about it appreciates it. It was an unforgettable meeting. He did not want it to be an official meeting, (initially it was supposed to be for half an hour in the Clementine Hall) but rather a fraternal meeting, and thus "among ourselves", without outsiders, not even ecclesiastical persons.

He was with us for three full hours, including a coffee break; he greeted each one of us individually. I saw him close up about three or four metres away. He embraced us with his gaze. It was not a prepared discourse, but he answered questions, in Spanish which we had prepared and shared during our Assembly of the Superiors General, and then a surprise, he announced that the year **2015 will be a year dedicated to the consecrated life.**

## **Notes on the themes discussed<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The text of Pope Francis' discourse to the Superiors General was not published. There were no journalists or cameramen present except at the very beginning. Fr Antonio Spadaro, a Jesuit was authorised to make a summary,

The Pontiff observed that gospel radicalism is required of all Christians, but religious are called to follow the Lord in a special way: *“They are men and women who can wake up the world. **Consecrated life is prophetic.** There is a need of prophecy because as Benedict XVI said ‘the Church does not grow by proselytism but by attraction’.* But he warned that *“we must be prophets and not play at being prophets ”.* *“God – he went on to say – asks us to flee our nest and to be sent to the corners of the world, avoiding the temptation to make ourselves at home. This is the surest way of imitating the Lord”.*

When asked about the situation of vocations, the Pope underlined that there are young Churches which are giving new fruits. That obliges us naturally to have a rethink about **the inculturation of the charism.** *“The charism is one but, as Saint Ignatius used to say, it has to be lived according to the places, the times and the people. There is the risk of making mistakes and committing errors, but this should not stop us because there is the risk of making glaring errors (in not becoming inculturated). In fact we must always ask forgiveness and look with great shame at the apostolic failures which were caused by a lack of courage. We think of the pioneering intuitions of Matteo Ricci, which during his time were not seized upon”.*

In this respect I liked an expression of Pope Francis about the charism: *“a charism is not a bottle of distilled water”;* the charism, like water, assumes the taste and the elements of the earth through which it passes. *“Inculturation does not have fixed rules, it has the spirit which regulates it, but both relativism and uniformism must be avoided”* he affirmed, adding that good fruits come *“when people of varying cultures, who express different ways of living the charism are members of the governing body of Orders and Congregations”.*

Pope Francis spoke much about **formation**, which in his opinion is based on four fundamental pillars: *“spiritual, intellectual, community and apostolic formation. When one arrives at perpetual profession these four dimensions should have been integrated in unity”.* In the process of formation all forms of hypocrisy and clericalism are to be avoided thanks to a frank and open dialogue on every aspect of life:

*“formation – he added – is a hand crafting process and not a detective process; it must take place in a dialogue between fathers and sons”.* *The objective is to form religious who have a tender heart rather than an attitude as sour as vinegar. We are all sinners, but we are not corrupt. We can accept sinners but not the corrupt”*

Then in answer to a question on **community life**, Pope Francis said that it had an enormous attraction. It presumes the acceptance of differences and also of conflicts. Sometimes it is difficult to live community life, but if it is not lived it does not bear fruitfulness.

What was particularly moving were his words about *problematic confreres.*

I will quote it almost verbatim.

*“In every family there are problems; and to imagine or dream of a community with no one in difficulty, does no good, because reality tells us that, everywhere in every family, or human grouping, there are conflicts. Therefore conflicts must be borne.*

*We have to do as in the parable of the Good Samaritan: should we be like the priest and the lawyer who see the conflict and pass by, ignoring it? Or the fool who sees the conflict who goes into it and stays there? Or take on the conflict, do what you can, overcome it and then carry on.*

*Once a town council leader told me that when he was 22 years old he had a crisis that made him depressed and made him an alcoholic. He lived with his mother who was a widow and very humble. He worked but when he was drinking he would oversleep and would not go to work at the factory. His mother worked taking in washing. In those days there were no washing machines, or they were very rare, and things were washed by hand in one’s house. He told me that in the mornings he*

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[which was reviewed by Pope Francis and published in La Civiltà Cattolica](#), Volume N°3925 of January 4th 2014, pgs.3-17. I am using my personal notes.

would still be recovering from his drunkenness, and used to see his mother up already, pass by his room before going out and look at him without saying anything and then go out. She looked at him with tenderness, and he could not resist this tenderness of his mother and he changed his way of life. Today he is a person of importance, a director. We need to have the goal of tenderness, in this way to look at the confrere who is the cause of the conflict. Our charity must reach this dimension, I would say almost to have a motherly tenderness. Fraternity is something very, very, delicate. I remember a phrase from a hymn for St. Joseph's feast day from the office of readings, in the Argentinean text, that went straight to the heart. It spoke of how to treat people, of how St Joseph treated his family and it said that he treated his family with "ternura de eucaristia", Eucharistic tenderness). It is poetic: treat one's brothers with "Eucharistic tenderness" the human and the sacred are one. It is a strong image that can help us. Therefore don't be afraid of conflict, face it, resolve it, accompany it, embrace it.....walk with it."

The Pope was asked some special questions. About **religious brothers being chosen as superiors** in clerical Congregations, he said that it was a canonical topic and must be examined at that level. About **relations between religious and bishops** and the dioceses he said it was a very important subject. He said that he knew by experience possible problems whether originating with the religious or the bishops. "The charisms of the various institutes must be respected and promoted because they are needed in the dioceses. We bishops – he said – must understand that consecrated people are not just there as helpers, but they are carriers of charisms that help the dioceses." The final questions to Pope Francis regarded **the margins of the mission of consecrated people**. "What margins, what frontiers did he indicate to the religious of today? "Each institute must go to the margins that have been searched out based on the charism" he replied. The charism gives different priorities and sensitivities, but what is important is that you go to these margins.

Pope Francis' words of **thanks** at the end were also informal and simple. Looking at his watch at 12.35 he sighed: "My love for you has got this far, because at 1 o'clock I have an appointment...with the dentist". He along with all of us burst into laughter. Then he went on: "I thank you for your spirit of faith. I thank you for being able to share my service with you and for your sharing. This is good for all of us. Thank you for all that you do. Thank you for your witness, thank you for the martyrs which you continue to give to the Church, thank you for the humiliations you have to go through because of defects, and failures, and thank you because you carry them well; it is a journey which we all have to pass through. Thank you from my heart".

**How can we follow and love Pope Francis?**

Whilst I was there listening to Pope Francis and seeing how he does things, it came to me very spontaneously: and me, what should I do? How do I need to change? And then: the Congregation of don Orione how can it respond to God who sent us this Pope, Francis a prophetic person and so close to our charism?

The Pope is a sure stability for the journey of the whole Church. But for us Orionines he must be followed and loved with a special adherence and passion, animated as we are by our specific charism of "special faithfulness to the Pope". In the prayer which we recite every week, we ask: "You have given him to us as our shepherd and teacher, give us also the constancy to profess to him all our docility and all our love as sons".<sup>2</sup> Don Orione explained that this docility and love consist in "following always in everything and for everything his teachings not only in matters of faith and morals but in everything that he as Pope teaches and commands...even his warnings, counsels and desires".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is the famous prayer of Ausonio Franchi, retouched and desired by Don Orione as a characteristic prayer of our Congregation in *The Don Orione prayer book*, pp.41-43.

<sup>3</sup> There are numerous passages in which don Orione shows us the demands of filial devotion to the Pope. "Let us have a great and sweet duty to be ready to put into practice even the small recommendations of the Pope. In a word, may you

“America loves the singer, but not the song” (l’America ama il cantante, ma non la canzone), was the great headline in a big American newspaper the day after Pope John Paul II’s World Youth day in Denver (in 1993), to show the popularity of the Pope and at the same time detachment from his teaching.<sup>4</sup> This is where our “orionicity” comes out! We must love both the “singer” and the “song” intoned by Pope Francis, “*corifeo (conductor) of the Church*”.<sup>5</sup>

And what if we Orionines individually or as a Congregation continued on as before, without doing something new or without changing, even in this Church of Pope Francis? We would be like those “children in the market place who turn to their companions and say: “We played the flute for you and you wouldn’t dance, we sang dirges and you wouldn’t cry” (Mt 11, 16-17).

Father Bartolomeo Sorge, in rapid pen strokes defined the Church of Paul VI as a Church of *dialogue*, the Church of John Paul II as *triumphant*, the Church of Benedict as *penitent and* the Church of Francis as *evangelical*, a Church free of worldliness, joyfulness in the gospel, poor and servant, close to the people, witnessing to the mercy of God.<sup>6</sup> There is a deep and living continuity between the two pontificates: only a penitent Church that recognises its sins and its “worldliness” and wants to be purified (Benedict XVI) can take on a new journey of deeply rooted evangelism of the Lord (Francis).

Pope Francis has put the Church on the path of faithfulness to the gospel, by his example, through his efforts and through so many messages and initiatives. All recognise it: We are part of a Church on the move. Pope Francis does not give us special objectives and precise guidelines on how the Church should be organized tomorrow to be more evangelical and missionary in the world of today. He calls us to a journey of conversion to Jesus and the gospel “without gloss”, welcoming the will of God and the surprises He brings...

**What is our religious life journey “in step” with Pope Francis?** What symphony are we making with the “*conductor of the Church*” in regard to religious life which “belongs intrinsically to the life and holiness of the Church” (LG 44)?

The superiors General in their assembly tried to answer these questions in the meeting last November asking indications from the Pope himself. From those notes I will try to give some guidelines and paths for this journey based on the magisterium of Pope Francis and of *Evangelii gaudium* in particular.<sup>7</sup>

### POPE FRANCIS AND OURSELVES: WHAT TYPE OF CONVERSION?

The gestures and the magisterium of Pope Francis invite us to a “conversion” in our following of Christ and in the service of our brothers and sisters: a conversion of our personal attitudes, our relationships, our stances and the style of mission.

Pope Francis calls all the Church to welcome and face the challenges of history and the problems of humanity with a *way of life* that is more evangelical, with a trustworthy attitude towards the world knowing how to see in the cornfield the grain that grows even though there is the darnel mixed in, participating in the love of God for the world.

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*always and everywhere my dear sons be devoted sons of the Pope*”; *Scritti* 52, 112.( Writings). “*We belong to the Pope from head to toe; we belong to him inside and out, with a complete adherence of our minds, actions,, works and our lives to whatever the Pope desires*”; *Parola* VI, 192.

<sup>4</sup> Newspapers and TV stations bombarded public opinion with interviews, statistics to demonstrate the many no’s to the Pope’s and the Church’s teaching by those very young people who were praising the Pope.

<sup>5</sup> *Corifeo*, means conductor of the choir or orchestra; it is an ecumenical title used for Peter also recognised by the Greek Church.

<sup>6</sup> From notes at the Union of Superiors General from the question of Bartolomeo Sorge in May 2013.

<sup>7</sup> It will be a quote from EG. A particular value for us would be the *videomessaggio of card. Jorge Bergoglio* addressed to us at the provincial Chapter in Buenos Aires in September of 2009, as we prepared for the General Chapter the following year. He made a few reflections on “*Only charity will save the world*”, anticipating some indications, now major guidelines of his pontificate. I quoted this document at “*the Chapter*”.

## 1. CONVERSION OF PERSONAL ATTITUDES

### a. *Religious centred on the essential*

The essential for us is “*God alone*”, the following of Christ, the witness of the gospel according to the charism.<sup>8</sup> It is through this faithfulness that we sustain our brothers and sisters in their journey toward the Lord.

Here is the heart of the dynamic of the renewal of the Church promoted by Pope Francis: “The joy of the gospel fills the heart and our whole life of those who meet Jesus” (EG 1). We need to begin and “*begin again from Christ*”,<sup>9</sup> to live “the same sentiments of Christ” (Phil 2:5), until we experience that “*it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me*” (Gal 2:20). This is why Pope Francis writes: “I will not tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which lead us to the centre of the gospel: ‘At the beginning of being a Christian there is no ethical decision or grand plan, rather the meeting with an event, a person, who gives life a new horizon and with that the sure way ahead »” (EG 7).

Pope Francis, before the splendid 288 points of his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, says simply: “I invite every Christian in whatever place or situation he finds him/herself, to renew this very day his personal meeting with Jesus Christ, or at least the decision to allow himself to be met by him, to search for him tirelessly every day.” (EG 3).<sup>10</sup>

**We need to take our conversion to discipleship seriously as an essential and indispensable condition if we are to carry out our mission** (“*pastores que se dejan pastorear*”), conscious of being “*at the cross roads of giving*”: all that God has given us in the way of faith, vocation and charism we are called to give to others.

Indeed Pope Francis had already recommended to us Orionines to be “*missionary disciples*” and “*pastors who allow themselves to wander the pastures*”. Not pastors who are autonomous or who can be assimilated into heads of NGO’s. The image of Jesus the good shepherd should model you into this image of the spiritual life, that is, *leaders being led*, where in the last analysis it is the good shepherd who stamps the image. It is the good shepherd who finally decides the journey we need to make (*at the chapter*).

Our very first task and service is *holiness, belonging to God*. It consists in identifying ourselves with Jesus, who has put at his centre the will of the father and people, being amidst “*the smell of the sheep*”,<sup>11</sup> using mercy and tenderness contemplating everyone and everything with his benevolent and respectful gaze.

Don Orione not only wanted us to be “centred” on the essential but also adhering to it: “*Already several times I have told you that to truly love the Lord, Our Lady and the holy things of the Church, we need almost to be fixated on them...We must be fixated uniquely on that which concerns the love and glory of God, of our Lady and the salvation of souls....what was our Lady’s attitude to Jesus? You know the answer: She lived only for him! She spoke only of him and for him,*

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, a Jesuit, has great esteem for the charisms of consecrated life. He writes: “The Holy Spirit enriches the Church which evangelises through its diverse charisms. They are gifts given to build up and renew the Church. In as much as a charism looks to the heart of the gospel so much will it be at the service of the Church” (EG 130).

<sup>9</sup> It is the title of the beautiful document on consecrated life in the third millennium. (2002).

<sup>10</sup> In EG 8, he warns that “there is a practical relativism more dangerous than doctrinal relativism” which “consists in acting as if God did not exist and decide as if the poor did not exist....only thanks to the encounter with God –or encountering the love of God, which translates into happy friendship, we are saved from our isolated conscience and our self-centredness” See the circular letter “*sons of faith*”: Atti e comunicazioni 2012, n.239, p.187-202.

<sup>11</sup> I first heard this expression of Pope Francis in the homily of the Mass of chrism on Holy Thursday 2013; and then it was often repeated. To get used to the smell of the sheep - he explains in EG24 – “whoever gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives bridges distances, and is willing to abase himself if necessary, and embrace human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.”.

she prayed and suffered quite freely for him; I would say she thought that which Jesus thought – if that were possible – so much did she, through her love, want to express her feelings, her thoughts as those of Jesus...to live in complete union, in everything with Jesus”.<sup>12</sup>

**b. Religious who have their authority in genuineness.**

**Our credibility is linked to the conformity of words and actions with the sincerity of life.**

From *genuineness* comes *authority*, and from authority comes being transfixed by evangelisation and the joy of it, “not as someone imposing an obligation, but rather sharing its joy. It signifies another horizon, a beautiful banquet. The Church does not grow by proselytism, but by attraction” (EG 14).

Pope Francis often denounces and calls by name the more common expressions of “spiritual worldliness”, which consist in looking for worldly honour and gain rather than the glory of the Lord”.

We find a whole list of expressions of spiritual worldliness at nos. 93-97 of *Evangelii gaudium*: “One is the attraction of Gnosticism, a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings”. The other is “the self-absorbed promethean neopelagianism, a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism”, “an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God’s faithful people, a fascination with social and political gain,” “management, statistics and plans”, “empty pleasure of complacency and self-indulgence”, “spiritual masters and experts of the ‘one should do this...,who give instructions but don’t get involved”.

Each one of us must be careful “not to be conformed to the mentality of this age” (Rm. 12:2) and to guard our own inner transparency, shaking off the “worldliness” that stops us from belonging more to God than to ourselves.

Speaking directly to us Orionines Pope Bergoglio said: “Your charity is marked and it must be marked by *poverty*. You live from day to day on Providence...Don’t build up big incomes because when we do that we put a hope there. And if you have your hope there you lose the most genuine thing: *hope in God’s Providence*. It is the most genuine thing your founder has given you”. “In this way” he added “I am sure the Congregation will flourish again with new vocations and you will have that joy which from the beginning made you cry out in every moment *Deo gratias*” (*At the Chapter*).

Pope Francis fears religious worldliness more than any other evil within the Church: “God deliver us from a worldly Church masquerading under worldly spirituality and service! We must avoid it, and the Church must get outside itself, to be centred on Jesus Christ and zeal for the poor”. And how much it is doing. It is a characteristic of the Church promoted by Pope Francis.

**c. Religious who express themselves with profound humanity.**

**We are invited to combat with decisiveness the throw away culture which can even enter into our way of life, recognising and defending the fundamental rights of every person; we are called to have the courage to express *tenderness*, above all to the weakest and the most disadvantaged.**

Pope Francis had already explained to us Orionines that we were about to celebrate the chapter of “*Only charity will save the world*” and how to react against the throw away culture: “You know that you are in this mundane pagan system: there are those who are in it (*caben*) and those who are not in it (*no caben*); those who are not in the system are many .. (*sobran*) and those who are too

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<sup>12</sup> *Sui passi di Don Orione*, p.88.(In the footsteps of don Orione) See the circular *The one thing necessary*. Identity and role of our religious life today: *Atti e comunicazioni* 2007, n.234, p.187-209. In that circular letter of 28th December 2007, I quoted Cardinal Bergoglio who compared Christ centeredness with the self-centeredness of spiritual worldliness (p. 190, note 8).

many are thrown away. These are real margins. That is where you should go. Not with the already satisfied, those who are already comfortable, who have everything. No to the real margins. I was very taken by a sister of your Congregation who insisted that the postulants before entering the novitiate should spend a good deal of time in the *Cottolengo*. “There is the real periphery of your charism. That means being prepared for wasting time with the mentally challenged, the sick, the terminal patient; wasting time with them because they are the flesh of Jesus.”

Even we religious must recognise our defects and our human limitations, without pretending that we have the answers to everything and everyone, but rather to search patiently for goodness and truth along with our brothers. Pope Francis speaks of a “revolution of tenderness” (EG 88), and of “aggressive tenderness” (EG 85), and of “Eucharistic tenderness”.

“Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people’s lives and know the power of tenderness”. (EG 270).

## 2. CONVERSION OF RELATIONSHIPS

### a. *Religious who can communicate in a simple, direct and understandable way.*

**We feel the importance of using every day language; to listen more so as to learn the words that others can understand.** We need to care about communication and its format trying to find words that make sense and touch people’s hearts because they reflect their lives.

Pope Francis is an effective and popular communicator not because he studies the techniques of communication, but because he has a heart and a *common experience* with the people to whom he addresses “*urbi et orbi*” (to the city and to the world). His communication is fruit of his sharing the *situations of life*, pastoral sympathy, human contact and a listening ear which he has lived in his long priestly, episcopal life, and now as the Pope. It is so true: when “the shepherd knows his sheep one by one...the sheep follow him, because they know his voice” (cf. Jn 10: 1-16).

In this regard something don Orione said comes to mind... “*Once I was preaching a Lenten retreat at Sale, where there was an archpriest who always wanted lots of people there. One evening a good few priests were gathered around the table with a good bottle of wine (well you know what it’s like!) and they were talking among themselves. They thought I was asleep because I had been hearing confessions and preaching and I was very tired, and they were talking among themselves: Who knows why that one there, who has not studied much, attracts the people more than us and we have degrees in theology? I, who was not asleep opened the door and I said: I’ll tell you why, because I’m poor, I know what it is to be hungry, to be cold, to be exhausted; but you lot are gentlemen. If you had undergone these things which I have you would find the right words that would have an effect: the people understand that we feel like him, that we suffer like him, the people feel the spirit of our Lord present*”.<sup>13</sup>

Pastoral *communication* is the fruit of life lived together.

The Pope dedicates the whole of Chapter 3 (110-175) of *Evangelii gaudium* to communication, with particular emphasis on the homily (135-144) and preaching (145-159). He says “The homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor’s closeness and ability to communicate to his people” (EG 135). This applies to the parish, the school or the *Cottolengo* or whatever.

It is a guideline of important conversion for us Orionines indeed I would say above all for those who say “I’m not cut out for preaching”, because they are more taken up with the practical

<sup>13</sup> From a sermon in a retreat to the Little Missionary sisters of Charity given 11<sup>th</sup> September 1919; they are from notes jotted down and not the *ipsissima verba*, (verbatim) but I think the idea is quite clear.

activities, closer to the people. Nearness to the ordinary life of people is an opportunity and not a difficulty for preaching which should have the tone and ideas of a “conversation of a mother”, as the Pope says, “by the closeness of the preacher, the warmth of his tone of voice, the unpretentiousness of his manner of speaking, the joy of his gestures.

Even if the homily at times may be somewhat tedious, if this maternal and ecclesial spirit is present, it will always bear fruit, just as the tedious counsels of a mother bear fruit, in due time, in the hearts of her children (EG 140).

For other preachers, Francis reminds us that “The homily cannot be a form of entertainment like those presented by the media, yet it does need to give life and meaning to the celebration.” (EG 138).

### **b. Religious on a journey with those in our care**

**Like Jesus with his disciples we are on a journey with those in our care and on the margins of society, those who are “desamparados” (who have no one).** It is a Spanish word which became very dear to don Orione. It is one of the main points of the Church that Francis is promoting. It is a central theme of our charism to which we need to be converted continuously.

“The area in which you must work is *the street*. God wants you to be callejeros, (*ramblers*) of the street, in the street”, is exactly what this Pope said to us. “Saint Pius X sent don Orione to the area outside St John’s gate, into the streets, not the sacristy. Please, may God free you from....contemplating your navel. No, the street, the place to go is the street, in the most symbolic meaning of that word, that is where the games of life takes place on the margins.”<sup>14</sup>

“On the street” means our real and true place.

The word “out of the sacristy” for us Orionines is well noted.<sup>15</sup>

How should we be priests “on the street”? Having recourse again to the image of the good shepherd Francis answers:

- “He will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant” (EG 31). Pope Francis observes that “many pastoral workers, although they pray, develop a sort of inferiority complex which leads them to minimize or conceal their Christian identity and convictions.” . One must not be afraid to be ready with boldness and holy initiative; one must not “stifle the joy of mission with a kind of obsession about being like everyone else” (EG 79).

“At other times he will simply be **in the midst** of all with unassuming and merciful presence” (EG 31). It will do good to the priest and the people. It will stop him from falling into *pastoral lethargy*, selfishness and standing still. ” (EG 81), we must not lose “ real contact with people, so that our work does not become depersonalized and leads more to getting things organised than being with people, so that we become enthusiastic more about the road map than the road itself ” (EG 82).

One would be living: “A faint melancholy, lacking in hope, which seizes the heart like “the most precious of the devil’s potions” [Georges Bernanos]” (EG 83).

- And yet at other times he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths” (EG 31).

With don Orione and with Pope Francis, we Orionines are called to “finding and sharing a “mystique” of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another,

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<sup>14</sup> In that talk *to the Chapter* he explained: “A Congregation that is just interested in its own little matters ends up deteriorating, with a smell of mustiness, no use to anyone, static. The surest way to cause spiritual lethargy is to live in the closed world of our own little things. A Congregation that goes out onto the street runs the risk of getting knocked about , but ask the Lord a thousand times to be a Congregation suffering knocks rather than be a static one.”.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of don Orione in *Sui passi(in the footsteps)*, p. 274.(English edition).



of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage” (EG 87).<sup>16</sup>

We all admire in Pope Francis his sensitivity to the personal dimension of relationships: he offers coffee to the guards, he brings a chair to the security guard, he gives cake to the workers, he telephones to various people with problems etc. Our activities and works are often well run and structured but we must not forget the personal relationships and gestures of charity.

**c. Religious who seek the will of God together with their brothers.**

**It is indispensable to “listen to what the Lord wishes to tell us in his word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call *lectio divina*” (EG 152).**

We are immersed in a world of a multiplicity of ideas, confusion and chattering. We need to practice the *exercise of gospel discernment*, in which hopefully we will find – with the help of the Holy Spirit – “a call which God causes to resound in the historical situation itself. In this situation, and also through it, God calls the believer” (EG 154).

“The wisdom of discernment frees us from the ambiguity of life and helps us find better means, which are not always seemingly greater. Discernment always has to be in the presence of God, looking at the signs, listening to what is happening, listening to the people, especially the poorest.”<sup>17</sup>

It is a process that requires time and patience, listening and dialogue, interior freedom and spirit of faith, and courage to assume decisions according to one’s own responsibility.

Pope Francis is bringing this about in the Church, promoting mechanisms and structures so that people can participate and consult,<sup>18</sup> with particular attention to communion with lay people who are “quite simply the immense majority of the people of God”

(EG 102), and the “indispensable contribution of women” (EG 103). In order to do this there are forms of clericalism and elitism that must be overcome, remembering that “in the Church, functions “do not favour the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others” (EG 104).<sup>19</sup>

The religious is a “contemplative of the Word and also a contemplative of the people”, “in order to read from events the message of God”, “what the Lord wants to say in a particular circumstance” (EG 154).

Searching for God’s will always imply a community, collegial dimension. We religious have tested mechanisms for community discernment and obedience,<sup>20</sup> but we need a practical conversion,

<sup>16</sup> “Nowadays we are seeing in many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women, an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity”. “At the same time, the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. As a result, one can observe in many agents of evangelization, even though they pray, a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervour” (EG 78).

<sup>17</sup> Interview in “*La civiltà cattolica*”.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis in a recent confidence said: “Now there are many people who tell me: don’t consult too much, decide. I believe however that consulting people is very important”.

<sup>19</sup> In this respect Francis observes: “The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general. It must be remembered that when we speak of sacramental power “we are in the realm of function, not that of dignity or holiness” (EG 104).

<sup>20</sup> In this sense *community meetings are important* (art.221, Norm 29); *meditation* (art.72) and *lectio divina* (CG 13 dec.3), the “*periodical revision of community life*” (art.77) which is one of the contents of the community meetings (art.29), and the community day (dec.11); *fraternal correction/fraternal promotion* “done with charity and sensitivity” (art.64), which the 12th Chapter defines as “an act of reciprocal love and a providential moment for growth in communion” (Doc.76) and that its ultimate sense is to help us together to do God’s will; the *community project* chooses some common principles for growth in how we respond to God. Specific forms of discernment are also prescribed for local, provincial and general government..

remembering that “in the Christian life we only ever do a lot when we do the will of God a lot”<sup>21</sup> and that “Sons of Divine Providence means sons of obedience”.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. CHANGE OF WAYS OF LOOKING AT AND STYLE OF MISSION

#### a. “Prophetic” religious

**We are called in our general attitudes and choices to grasp and help others to grasp the signs which invite us to change and so express prophecy and vision of the future.**

Pope Francis, who is a Jesuit religious, values the prophetic role of religious life. “In the Church religious are called in particular to be prophets who give witness of how Jesus lived on this earth and who announce how the Kingdom of God will be in its perfect state. A religious must never give up his prophecy...Let us think about what so many great holy monks, men and women religious have done beginning with St. Anthony, abbot. To be prophets sometimes means to make “ruido”, noise, I do not know how to put it...Prophecy makes noise. But in reality its charism is to be yeast. Prophecy announces the spirit of the Gospel”.<sup>23</sup>

In his meeting with the Superiors General Pope Francis took up this theme again and exhorted to “*be prophets and not play games with being so*”.

So many messages of Pope Francis can be summed up by saying, “*go out and make others go out*” in a lively journey on the open roads of the Gospel, in a permanent state of mission, freeing ourselves from every type of institutional rigidity, “*advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are*” (EG 25).

Religious are called to a specific prophecy: to live and give witness in a visible way, through concrete choices, to the *sign of brotherly love* which unites all to each other, overcoming the temptations of individualistic introversion to “take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends, renouncing the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel” (EG 88).

The other important prophecy of religious is that of the service of charity (*servitium caritatis*)<sup>24</sup>. “*The Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction*”(EG 88). “*..Interpersonal relationships provided by sophisticated equipment, by screens and systems which can be turned on and off on command*” (EG 88) cannot be enough.

We Orionines must distinguish ourselves by means of an enterprising and brotherly *imaginative charity* by going to meet our brothers and sisters in need and without human protection “doing something” in the name of Divine Providence, with charitable works which are simple, flexible and meaningful, ahead of the times.

#### b. Religious who live charity towards the poor and spread the culture of meeting.

**We are invited to promote and give witness to the “culture of meeting” as a style of life and mission, with acts of closeness especially towards the least, the weak and the sick that are the flesh of Christ in our midst.**<sup>25</sup>

Speaking to us Orionines in 2009, Cardinal Bergoglio reminded us that “the existential frontier of God is the Word which has come in the flesh, the flesh of the Word. This is what saves us from

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<sup>21</sup> Writings: *Scritti* 55, 13.

<sup>22</sup> See the Circular: “*May your will be done*”: a Son of Divine Providence means son of obedience: *Atti e comunicazioni* 2008, n.226, pp.107-127.

<sup>23</sup> As in Interview in “*La civiltà cattolica*”.

<sup>24</sup> *Confessio trinitatis, signum fraternitatis* and *servitium caritatis* are the three dimensions and duties of the consecrated life explained in the postsynodal exhortation *Vita Consacrata* (1996).

<sup>25</sup> Numbers 197-201 of EG deal with “the privileged place of the poor in the People of God”. “This option – teaches Benedict XVI - «is implicit in the Christological faith in which God made Himself poor for us, to enrich us through His poverty»” (EG 164). Cf. “*Seeing and serving Christ in man*”: *Atti e comunicazioni* 2008, n. 227, pp. 251-269.

every heresy, from gnosis, from ideologies etc. Seek the flesh of Christ there. Go to the existential frontiers with courage and lose yourselves there. Be sure that the newspapers will not talk about you. What you do, for example in the Cottolengos, does not make news. What you do for street children does not make news, is not interesting to the world because this is rubbish. They are the existential frontiers. Let yourselves be led by the Good Shepherd towards this existential frontier to express love and charity”.

For us Orionines it is very important to hear repeated by the Pope to all the Church that **“to touch the flesh of the Word”**, those who are the “scrap heap of society”, as Don Orione used to say, “the rubbish dump of society, the precarious life of the margins”, as Francis says, **is truly pastoral action and evangelization.**

Don Orione has formed our conscience in such a way that when we carry out one of the many acts or services in the works of charity, we are doing a work of evangelization, because *“charity opens the eyes of faith and warms the hearts of people to the love of God”*. In common communication, I often find myself presenting two images of the Founder – *“We must be priests of the stole and of work”* and *“beside every place of worship there should be a place of charity”* – that well express the Orionine teaching of the union of evangelization and the ministry of charity in our mission.

“From the heart of the Gospel”, the Pope writes, “we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization” (EG 178). The service of charity is an essential part of the life of the Church. In fact, “The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable” (*“Deus caritas est”, 25*).

I will not spend more time on this aspect of the Church of Pope Francis because it is the most “Orionine” one in which we find our identity.<sup>26</sup>

**c. Joyful religious, bearers of hope.**

The whole world has been struck by this Pope who is happy, confident, calm and smiling with a joyful spontaneity which comes from deep within. All note that his is not an “air hostess’ smile”.<sup>27</sup> He explains, “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew” (EG 1).

The first step to renewing the Church and her mission in the world today is to renew the joy of the Gospel in Christians, the *Evangelii gaudium*. Only in this way can “a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come” begin (EG 1).

Pope Francis is inviting all to go to the sources of Christian joy. “No one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. In a special way “an evangelizer should not have a funeral face”.<sup>28</sup>

Pope Francis also quotes the *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI which says, “And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ” (EG 10).

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<sup>26</sup> See the Circular Letter *“Let it be absolutely clear that the Little Work is for the poor”* (*Resti ben determinato che la Piccola Opera è per i poveri*): *Atti e comunicazioni* 2012, n.231, pp. 3-11.

<sup>27</sup> It is an expression of Francis said of certain sisters at a meeting with the Poor Clares of Assisi when he said, “They smile like air hostesses but not with a smile which comes from the heart”.

<sup>28</sup> Why so many funeral faces? “When the interior life closes itself in its own interests there is no more space for others, the poor do not enter, the voice of God is no longer listened to, the sweet joy of his love is no longer enjoyed, and the enthusiasm of doing good is not felt. Many fall and become bitter, unhappy, and lifeless”.

Also we Orionines must we not walk in the Church of Pope Francis starting from here, from joy? Our joy, as missionary disciples of the charity of God, comes from meeting with Christ: “With Christ joy is constantly born anew” (EG 1).

Joy is a fruit and a grace to be asked for.

I was impressed by autobiographical expression of Don Orione which I read as a youth: “*Lord, I am not worthy, but I need your joy, a chaste joy, an enrapturing joy, which brings us to peace, above ourselves and all things, immense joy! The soul has decided to conquer all in order to rise up: it is the joy of humility*”. Who knows what was going on in the soul of Don Orione! How many times in my life I have made this prayer: Lord, I need your joy more than anything else.

The joy of the Gospel is that which nothing and no one can ever take away (cf. John 16:22). The rest follows. “Challenges exist to be overcome. Let us be realists, but with losing joy, courage and dedication full of hope! Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary strength!”

Dear Confreres, the message of my letter ends here, or, rather begins here.

Pope Francis is not pointing out the way the Church should go, his is showing us by example. So, what are we doing? Do we truly want to follow the shepherd, and on new roads, or are we content with applause which leaves us where we are?

There are those among us who call to prudence: “better to wait”; “the enthusiasm is great, but how long will it last?” There is the risk of minimizing the newness of Francis and not seeing that the Gospel has begun a new course in the world so remain on the touch lines, waiting for things to become clearer, that the promised reforms arrive, that the fruits may be seen and that the predictable opposition reveals itself.

There, in the Synod Hall, on 29<sup>th</sup> November last, a sense of joy more than a sense of duty led me to ask myself, “So, what must I do? How must I change? How can the Orionine Congregation respond to God who has sent us this Pope, Francis?”

The reply is certainly not in these pages even though I have tried to write them with great care.

Before working out a well thought out and organised answer, in prayer, I understood a *voice from Heaven*, suggest without hesitation, “Much! You must change a lot”.

Then I saw a *face in Heaven*, with two big eyes and the continuous smile, that added, “I voted for him in Heaven, on the day of my birthday in Heaven. I knew him. I know Latin America well and I knew that he was coming to you down there. But now it’s up to you to wake yourselves up”.

### FAMILY NEWS

The four-month period from September to December of 2013 was characterised by important events of the congregation. First of all was the [General Assembly of verification](#), held at Aparecida (Brazil) from 13 to 20<sup>th</sup> October 2013. There was a good fraternal atmosphere with a clear aim and methodology, that is, to verify and re-launch the path indicated by the General Chapter of 2010. [The Document](#) produced by the Assembly is rather simple and proposes *some new practical guidelines* to give continuity to the way of renewal proposed by the Chapter. As always in these meetings of the Congregation there are important shared feelings and insights which develop into later ways and decisions. So, we shared together our thoughts at the end of the Assembly and here are some notes which I made:

- We need to take more care of the *life-giving link to the sources of charity* from which flows all the power of God in us, in fraternal relations, in the ministries of charity, in vocational fruitfulness and in the new frontiers of witness.
- There is a yearning to return to *more direct relationships* between religious and the people we are sent to, between religious and works/activities, and a reaction to the tendency to make big institutions and virtual (internet) relationships.
- The good family atmosphere which generally gives life to the Congregation needs to mature into more concrete *brotherly correction and support*.

- There is confidence about the *vitality of new charismatic initiatives*, with new responses to the new challenges and needs posed by society and today's culture. It is above all lay people who are taking the lead with the support and spiritual guidance of religious.
- In the social context in which we live, characterised by continuous evolution, it is necessary to give preference to *small, more flexible and meaningful works of charity*. Alongside the institutions which are "lighthouses of faith and civilisation" we need to put activities and relationships of "which act as catalysts and salt" to the rest.
- Many factors speak to us about the great *fragility* of religious, communities and the Congregation. Truly we carry a great treasure in clay vessels. This fragility should be accepted with spiritual and practical compassion as an opportunity for a new evangelization of our own lives and for brotherly help.
- We must of course concentrate on *fidelity* (doing "better") but also commit ourselves to *creativity* (making "new") because the charism is an investment (the *talent*) and a renewable energy (the *fire*). Therefore fidelity to the charism calls us to concentrate more on discernment than on fulfilment and more on overall vision than on detailed plans.

The Assembly was surrounded by other very important events of the Orionine Family. At Montevideo, from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> October, the [General Assembly of the Orionine Lay Movement](#) was held. It was the first after the canonical approval as a public international association of lay faithful, which happened on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2012. During it the *Body of practical regulations*, which specifies what is already present in the *Statute*, was approved. The assembly was also elective and so chose the new General Co-ordination for 2013-2016, namely, Sig. Javier Rodriguez (Spain) was renewed as the general co-ordinator, Sra. Virginia Zalba (Argentina) was elected as the vice-co-ordinator, Sra. Amanda Sano (Italy) was renewed as the secretary general, to be assisted by Alejandro Bianco (Argentina), Giovanni Botteri (Italy) and Luigina Collico (Italy).

On 13<sup>th</sup> October, while the General Assembly was gathering in Aparecida, [our two Spanish martyrs, Fr. Ricardo Gil and Antonio Arrué Peirò, were beatified](#), together with a large number of heroic witnesses to the faith in Spain, **at Tarragona**. A sizeable delegation from our Congregation was present, led by the postulator, Fr Aurelio Fusi and the provincial superior of Spain and Venezuela, Fr José Antonio Ruiz. Let us keep as a souvenir of this important event the words of Pope Francis at the opening of the ceremony of beatification: "*We must always go out of ourselves and open ourselves to Christ, we must not be mediocre and selfish Christians and we must be faithful baptised people and ask the intercession of the martyrs to be concrete Christians in fact and not just words*".

On 20<sup>th</sup> October at Aparecida, at the conclusion of the General Assembly, there was the celebration of the [beginning of the Orionine Missionary Year](#). It was a Family event with an exceptional representation of categories (FDP, PSMC, ISO, and MLO) and nations. About 2000 Orionine pilgrims from the houses of Brazil, 120 concelebrants, among whom were our bishops, Lazzaris, Mykycej, Uriona and Ahoua, all the General Council, the Provincial Superiors and the Delegates of various nations to the General Assembly. There were present the Superior General, Mother Mabel and a good group of the LMSC (PSMC), the one in charge of the Orionine Secular Institute (ISO) in Brazil and the Co-ordinator General of the OLM (MLO). To show that the Orionine charism is spread in the various peoples after the departure of the first missionaries in 1913, I gave to Brazil a precious reliquary containing the *Blood of Don Orione* which will go on pilgrimage in the various houses and parishes. A similar reliquary will be given to the principal nations in which the charism of Don Orione is present through his sons and daughters.

After the great meetings, I went to visit our new missions at Buritis and Porto Velho. The *Blood of Don Orione* continues to flow with great vitality among that people and those poor.

Among the other more significant events, the [Orionine Synod for Africa and Madagascar](#) which met from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> September at Bonoua, deserves a mention. Representatives from the Orionine Congregation in the Ivory Coast, Togo, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mozambique and Madagascar were present. Also present were the superior general, Fr Eldo Musso, the provincial superiors, Fr Pierangelo Ondeï, Fr Aparecido Da Silva, Fr Malcolm Dyer, and Fr Basile Aka. The aim of the Synod was to look together (= syn-od) comparing experiences and policies on certain practical themes of inculturation of religious life and our charism in Africa and Madagascar, and also to study some ways of stable cooperation to reach a united and tangible way forward of the Congregation in the different nations of Africa and Madagascar.

At Montebello and Tortona from 4<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> November the [course of formation in the charism for Orionine Formators](#) was held. Some *practical guidelines for formation in the charism* emerged and they were sent around by the General Councillor Fr Freitas.

I remember also some of my visits in the last few months which allowed me to experience the communion and vitality of the Congregation: [in Poland](#) on the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Congregation, [in Venezuela](#), where I found a surprising Orionine pastoral and charitable liveliness, in spite of many social problems, [in Jordan](#), where Don Orione speaks Arabic through our dear Confreres there and many lay people who have made their own the spirit of Don Orione.

### **Our communion of prayer**

As always I invite you to pray for our dear departed.

The Lord has called to Himself some particularly significant *Confreres* in the life of the Congregation: P. [José Oscar Baldussi](#): for many years formator and spiritual director in Argentina; Don [Valentino Barbiero](#): vocation of Don Orione, a humble priest among the humble; P. [Luigi Carbonelli](#): generous missionary in Argentina; Ks. [Marian Klis](#): professor, formator and provincial in Poland; Don [Ettore Conti](#): zealous father and shepherd of souls; and two young confreres, Don [Lorenzo Benzi](#): 59 years of age, missionary and formator in the Ivory Coast; P. [Oscar Alcides Pezzarini](#): 51 years of age, physically and pastorally a tour of strength in Argentina.

Let us pray for other deceased members of our Family: the *Little Missionary Sisters of Charity*: Sr Maria Louiza, St Maria Guidina, Sr. Maria Eletta, Sr. Maria Rosina and Sr. Maria Luisa; the *father* of: Don Gaetano Ceravolo, P. Kokou Fo Eden Paul Assidenou and Pe. Ricardo Paganini; the *mother* of: Fratel Bruno Piccini (already deceased), Fr. John Socorro Castillo; the *brother of*: Don Mario Ghio, Don Fulvio Ferrari, Pe. Geraldo Maiela and Pe. José Geraldo Da Silva, Don Gino and Angelo Pasinato (already deceased); the *sister of*: Don Giuseppe Vallauri and Brother Adelmo Masi (already deceased).

I would like to give my best wishes for good service and invite you to pray for the *new superiors of community* who have started their duties in the Provinces of Latin America.

Let us pray for our older Confreres. I call them “magnificent” because he is truly great and worthy of praise who perseveres in his vocation and serves the Congregation reaching a venerable age.

I thank and pray to the Lord for the gift of *new vocations* and for the arrival of new brothers in the Congregation. There are 45 novices spread throughout the Orionine world. Let us wish perseverance in their journey with God to the 37 newly professed, the 23 deacons and the 9 priests of 2013.

Let us pray for our *sick*, whom it is more difficult to list and for those who are passing through moments of spiritual or moral trials. May our affectionate communion and brotherly help give them assistance for their health and comfort to their hearts.

Finally, at the beginning of the new year 2014 I invoke on you all, Confreres and on all who live in and frequent our houses, schools, parishes and missions, the blessing of the liturgy of the 1<sup>st</sup>

January: “The LORD bless you and keep you! The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace! (Num.6:24-26).

In Christ and in Don Orione,

Don Flavio Peloso FDP  
(superior general)