

## Ubi Amor Ibi Oculus

### *Observatory of Poverty: Educating the gaze to awaken the heart*

#### **Dearest Confreres,**

in a previous Circular of 2017, *Awakening the Heart*, I concluded a reflection on Jesus' encounter with the Widow of Nain (cf. Lk 7:11–17) by recalling the medieval saying: *Ubi amor, ibi oculus* (where there is love, there is the ability to see). At that time, I underlined, with the words of the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (n. 31), that the programme of Jesus is a “*heart that sees*” and, therefore is able to reach the person at their most wounded point. His compassion does not come from a vague idea of kindness, but from a gaze that does not skim the surface, does not reduce the other to just another case, and does not protect itself with distance. Within the “*large crowd from the city*”, Jesus' eyes are fixed above all on that widow whose only son “*was being carried out to the tomb*”: “*When the Lord saw her, he was moved with compassion...*”. A gaze inhabited by the heart, knows how to give priority; how to recognise what is essential; how to stop where pain is most urgent.

I also added that, if it is true that “*Ubi amor, ibi oculus*”, it is equally true that “*Ubi oculus, ibi amor*”: where our gaze dares to see suffering without turning away, there love can be reborn. This is a discipline of the “gaze” that becomes a discipline of the “heart”. And this discipline draws its source from the Eucharist, especially when we ask: “*Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters; inspire in us words and deeds to comfort the weary and the oppressed. May we serve them with a sincere heart, after the example of Christ and at his command.*” (Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs, IV).

From this prayer there arises for us a very concrete task: to train our gaze so as to awaken the heart. Often it is not that we do not love; it is that we do not see well enough. We grow accustomed to situations, we adapt to fragility, we “normalise” the tears of others or – worse still – we turn poverty to ideology, so that the poor become victims of political slogans. In this way, our charity risks becoming mainly “institutionalised”: organised responses, tidy for bureaucracy, preoccupied with procedures and accounts, but lacking the warmth of encounter.

The 15th General Chapter, in Line of Action no. 8 on a “*A Poor lifestyle for the apostolate among the poor*”, while recognising in the Provinces and Delegations “*notable efforts... to respond to frontier forms of poverty*”, also highlighted some “*fears and resistance*”. It acknowledged that at times we struggle to leave our Communities and traditional activities (our comfort zones) to face, with a poor style, the new forms of poverty and the emerging situations of these new times (cf. 15CG no. 52).

Faced with this reality, the Chapter urged us to dream: “*We dream of a Religious Family which increasingly passes from works of charity to living charity itself...*”. And to make the dream real, the Chapter document proposed as the first of five actions in Line no. 8 the establishment “*at all levels*” of an “*Observatory of Poverty*”.

### **“Observatory of Poverty”: what are we talking about?**

The proposal for an **“Observatory of Poverty”** matured during the General Chapter, originally within Commission 2 (Communion Core), dedicated to the *“Roles and relationships of the religious with apostolic activity”*.

In the discernment of the assembly, the proposal was accepted but placed within Line of Action no. 8 on a *“A poor lifestyle for the apostolate among the poor”*. This already gives us a decisive indication: the *“Observatory”* is not to be understood primarily as an office or a new structure, but as a style. It is a choice of charismatic coherence: to remain close to real poverty, especially that which makes no noise and is not immediately visible, and to learn to read and observe the territory with evangelical eyes.

The proposal was influenced by an ecclesial experience recalled by some Italian confrères: the *“Observatory of Poverty and Resources”* (OPR) promoted by Caritas Italiana in many dioceses. Born in the context of the Ecclesial Convention of Loreto (1985), the OPR was conceived as a tool of the local Church to systematically identify situations of poverty, hardship and exclusion, and to help interpret the responses already in place. A pastoral note of the Italian Bishops (1985) reminded us: it is necessary to *“acquire adequate competence in reading situations of poverty... with a ‘permanent observatory’ which should not be lacking in any local Church”*.

Its structure helps us to understand: one person alone is not enough. A small team is needed, with different skills (listening, IT and statistical tools, social analysis, theological sensitivity) coordinated by a reference person. The aim is not to produce data for its own sake, but to offer concrete help for discerning and animating pastoral and charitable activity.

For this reason, the Chapter’s indication can be of great help: at every level let an *“observatory of poverty”* be encouraged, one that stimulates and organises new responses. The objectives are clear: to learn how to read reality, the needs and fragilities of places and people: to share what emerges, to discern together and to let ourselves be guided towards bolder choices. It is a way never isolate ourselves, to remain close to the least, and to preserve, amid the transformations of the present time, the beauty of Orionine charity.

### **“Seeing the World as God Sees It”**

To understand the importance of this Chapter proposal, let us begin with a key passage from Pope Francis’ address to our Family at the end of the Chapter. The Pope reminded us that to throw ourselves *“into the fire of new times”* means *“to see the world as God sees it”*, without fear and without prejudice, with discernment and sympathy. He pointed us to the Word that guides this gaze, recalling the experience of the Exodus: *“I have seen the misery of my people... I have come down to deliver them”* (Ex 3:7–8). And he concluded: *“We must see the miseries of the world as the reason for our apostolate and not as an obstacle.”*

These words give us a charismatic and pastoral key: the *“new times”* are not only a challenge to face, but a place to inhabit with an apostolic heart, learning to see reality *“as God sees it”*.

In the episode of the burning bush, recalled by the Pope, what strikes us is the insistence on the verb *“to see”*, which accompanies both Moses’ steps and God’s action. Moses *“sees”* a sign that troubles and attracts him; God *“sees”* the misery of his people and, from this vision, reveals himself as a God who is sensitive and involved, with a heart set in motion (cf. Ex 3:1–17).

The biblical text strongly insists that this is not a distracted gaze nor a generic pity: it is the deep gaze of a Father who looks to the heart of things. And immediately the vision becomes listening: “*I have heard their cry*”; then it becomes knowledge in the fullest sense: “*I know their sufferings*”, meaning, I take them to heart; finally, it becomes decision: “*I have come down to rescue them... and to bring them out*”. This is the divine dynamism: he sees, he hears, he knows, he comes down. If God is God, he cannot remain neutral. Thus, takes shape his great “*descent*”, which runs through history and reaches its summit in the incarnation of the Son.

There is then a detail that touches us closely: God’s response to the cry of the poor is not first of all “something”, but “someone”. God answers by calling Moses: “Now go, *I am sending you! Bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt...*” (Ex 3:10). This is the vocational logic that runs through all the Scripture: God sees and responds with a messenger; yesterday Moses and the prophets, then the Son; and today still the Church, the disciples of Jesus. He called Luigi Orione and continues to call us, his sons: He sees, He calls, He sends, He involves, He sets us on the way.

In this horizon we understand the true nature of the “Observatory of Poverty”. I insist: it must not be thought of primarily as an office or a new structure, but as a discipline of the gaze and of the heart: a humble attempt to take on God’s own perspective, learning to observe, to listen and to discern as he does. In the episode of the burning bush, God does not give Moses mere information, but a way of standing before reality so as to throw himself into the “fire”: he sees misery, hears the cry, knows the suffering and comes down to deliver. It is a gaze that immediately becomes mission.

Therefore, **to see the world as God sees it** means letting ourselves to be educated in the gaze of the heart: to see miseries as the reason for apostolate, to hear cries that find no voice, to read and discern reality together, and to translate what we see into choices of charity.

### **The life of the people is a source of apostolic charity**

“*I have seen the misery of my people, I know their sufferings and I have come down to rescue them*” (Ex 3:7–8). If God reveals himself with this dynamism of the gaze, whoever wishes to follow him must learn to look in the same way.

The Gospel confirms this dynamism. “*Seeing the crowds, Jesus was moved with compassion*” (Mt 9:36). This is not a passing feeling, but a profound movement born of a gaze that does not slip away<sup>1</sup>. Jesus “*sees*” people who are “*tired and worn out*” and from that seeing, comes a call: “*The harvest is great... pray...*”. His compassion is creative: it gives birth to disciples, raises up workers, opens new paths. The face of the people becomes a place of revelation and the origin of mission: here too, the answer is not “something”, but “someone”.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis told the religious gathered in Genoa: “*If we imagine what the time of Jesus' day was like, reading the Gospels we can say that most of his time was spent on the streets. This means closeness to the people, closeness to the problems. He wasn't hiding. Then, in the evening, so many times he hid to pray, to be with the Father. And these two things, this way of seeing Jesus, on the street and in prayer, helps so much for our daily lives.*” It is in this text that the Pope cited Don Orione as an example of a priest who “*leads a life of encounter, with the Lord... and with the people*”. (27/05/2017)

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 9 of the Gospel of Matthew is structured within a vocational and missionary dynamic: this chapter, with verse 36 - “*Seeing the crowds he felt compassion for them...*” - concludes with the appeal to prayer (“*Therefore pray to the master of the harvest who sends workers into his harvest!*” v. 38) and the next chapter opens with the call of the twelve and the instructions for the mission.

The 13th General Chapter (2010), reflecting on the first nucleus “Sources”<sup>3</sup>, gave us this insight: *“The life of poor people, in need of bread and of God, is a true source of apostolic charity and not only its goal.”* From this flows a fundamental truth: people are not only “recipients” of our service, but a “spring” that must generate in us compassion, sharing and a charismatic step. This is why the 13th Chapter asked us to *“review and better promote our contact with people, ordinary closeness, sharing of life with a humble, simple and popular style”*.

In this light we also understand what Pope Francis says in *Lumen Fidei* (n. 18): *“Faith... looks from the point of view of Jesus, with his eyes: it is a participation in His way of seeing.”* Faith, then, is not only believing something about God: it is receiving new eyes and entering into the gaze of Christ. And where do we learn concretely this “point of view of Jesus”? We learn it where Jesus allows himself to be encountered: in the little ones, the poor, the suffering, the crowds searching for meaning. *“The Christian can have the eyes of Jesus, his feelings... because he is made to share in his Love, which is the Spirit. It is in this Love that one receives, in some way, the very vision of Jesus.”* (n. 21)

Here is the concrete consequence, both evangelical and charismatic: if the life of the poor is a “source”, then we must review and promote our contact with people. Not sporadic, not delegated, not mediated only by works, but personal and communal, relational; not only assistance, but sharing; not only services, but presence; not only the restrictive preservation of our spaces, but openness and readiness to welcome, and not only when it “suits us”.

### **“We must go to the people!”**

Of Don Orione – *“a man of great and clear visions”*, yet not a *“theorist”* – it is said that, in relation to his historical reality, *“he was a very flexible person”*. Yet, *“it was not a flexibility without identity”*, because what guided him *“through such changing times”* was *“his inner world, particularly strong and inspired”*<sup>4</sup>. It was a *“rooted flexibility”*: it had *“principle and foundation”*, born from a centre inhabited by *“God alone”*. Precisely because he had a solid “inside”, he could cross a changing “outside” without losing his identity.

This flexibility was marked by a way of looking that did not stop at the surface of events but welcomed them as a call from God and from the people. Don Orione did not observe from afar: he lived reality, read his times, understood the transformations of work and the rise of new popular protagonists. He did not mature this ability in solitude, nor in books<sup>5</sup>: he was formed within a network of relationships, associations, ecclesial and popular initiatives, especially in the years when he was custodian of the Cathedral<sup>6</sup> and in the pastoral climate guided by Monsignor Iginio Bandi<sup>7</sup>. There the young Luigi Orione learned to be where the needs of the people were and to translate charity into concrete, intelligent and organised responses.

<sup>3</sup> The three SOURCES of charity to draw upon vitally are: Life of God, Life of the Church, and Life of the People.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. PELOSO, F. Il Tempo di Don Orione, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Don Ignazio Terzi captures the decisive point precisely: “Don Orione is not a sociologist, nor could we perhaps say a great thinker. His intuition comes from a life lived (his family origins, his difficulties in reaching the priesthood), from a deep love for the people...” In: TERZI I. *Don Orione nel centenario della nascita*, pag. 154.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. LANZA A. I fondamenti della gioia di Don Orione. In: *Atti 187* (Gennaio-Aprile 1995), pag. 47-67. In particular, point no. 3: “What freedoms did the young Orion have (as custodian of the Cathedral).

<sup>7</sup> *“The decisive meeting that guided the social apostolate of the young Don Orione, especially in the world of work, was Monsignor Iginio Bandi, bishop of Tortona from 1890 to 1914, a prelate at the national vanguard of socially engaged Catholicism. Don Orione passionately shared the many social and pastoral initiatives of this Bishop of his, inspired by the indications of the Social Encyclicals of Leo XIII and the Rerum Novarum”*. CLERICI, P. Lavoro manuale, santa fatica, spirito di sacrificio. In: *Messaggi* 156, pag. 17.

He did not remain a spectator: he chose the places where faith became service and responsibility.

In the Society of St Vincent de Paul he learned a method of charity: not distance, but closeness; not haste, but time given. Unable to offer money, he offered himself: visiting families and the poor, educating himself to read misery “on the spot”<sup>8</sup>. In the Catholic Workers’ Society “San Marziano” he came into direct contact with the world of labour and its struggles: he understood that charity is not only almsgiving, but also promotion, dignity, protection, solidarity with those at risk of being crushed by insecurity.<sup>9</sup> And in the context of Catholic social action of the time, marked by the *Opera dei Congressi*, he assimilated a decisive intuition: charity requires the impulse of the heart, but also a shared reading of reality and the ability to work in network. Thus, his associative participation made him truly a priest capable of uniting spiritual ardour and social realism, fidelity to the Church and creative action.<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect sheds light on his way of entering and interpreting new realities moving: his moving “*in an ecclesial key*”. Emblematic, for example was his insertion in Brazil: arriving in Rio de Janeiro in 1921, on the very day of landing (20 August), he already had a meeting with the Apostolic Nuncio; and before leaving for Mar de Espanha, where the first missionaries lived, he wanted to meet the Cardinal Archbishop, Monsignor Arcoverde Albuquerque, and his Auxiliary, Monsignor Sebastião Leme. His stay was also marked by conversations with the Archbishops of Mariana and São Paulo, to share pastoral orientations and projects. It was not mere “protocol”: but the concrete choice to read reality within the life of the Church, listening to its urgencies and indications, in order to serve better.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Don Orione became a keen observer of reality. His gaze, profoundly human and at the same time ecclesial, did not stop at mere observation: he brought facts into the discernment of faith, into communion with the Church and into abandonment to Divine Providence, in order to serve with love. His poor family origins, his associative experiences, his closeness to the poor, his contact with the world of labour and his attention to local Churches taught him an essential method: to meet, to listen, to read the signs of the times, to act with decision.

From this school was born the “*strategist of charity*”, “*one of the most eminent personalities of this century for his openly professed Christian faith and for his heroically lived charity*”. His secret, his genius? “*He allowed himself only and always to be led by the compelling logic of love!*”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> It appears that Don Orione and Lorenzo Perosi “went every week to the ramparts of the old city, to the stacks and to, in the poor stambergae of the attics, to look for the poor, to distribute to them the subsidies of the Conference of St. Vincent, of which they were the youngest members.” In: LANZA. Op. cit. pag. 53.

<sup>9</sup> “While the cleric Orione was custodian in the Cathedral he actively participated in the Catholic Workers’ Society S. Marziano in Tortona was a mutual aid society, it was aimed, in a special way, at the comfort and assistance of workers, with the provision of medicines to the sick, of financial aid to widows and orphans”. CLERICI, P. Lavoro manuale... Op. Cit. In: *Messaggi* 156, pag. 17.

<sup>10</sup> “The fervent work of Leo XIII, the Bishops, the clergy, and the lay leaders in the last part of the 19th century, succeeded in mobilizing the popular masses to the cause of Christ, the Church and the Fatherland. This is a very lively and exuberant moment in the life of the Italian Church. The cornerstone of this ‘mobilization of consciences’ is the Work of Catholic Congresses and Committees. PELOSO F., In: San Luigi Orione: da Tortona al mondo, pg. 75.

<sup>11</sup> This sensitivity of Don Orione is translated into order in our Constitutions: “In carrying out [a specific apostolic mission] we commit all our forces and faithfully adhere to the indications and pastoral plans of the Church, so that, convinced that our apostolic action is exercised in the name and by mandate of the Church, it is conducted by us always in full communion with it.” (Art. 117).

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. John Paul II in the Homily of the Beatification, 26/10/1980.

## From “Father” to “Sons”

Our history shows how the charism of Don Orione generated sons: confrères who, without seeking heroism, but with faith and a spirit of sacrifice, knew how to unite intelligence and heart, passion and initiative. Guided by Providence and by that “*compelling logic of love*” which was the Founder’s secret, they became attentive observers of reality and learned to respond creatively, turning charity into concrete works and choices.

Many were “generated” by Don Orione also in a direct way: they met him, listened to him and were shaped by him. Don Angelo Mugnai, a cleric at the Paterno (1931–32; 1936–38), offers a luminous testimony: he recalls how Don Orione conquered hearts especially during the “*Good Night*” talks, when he opened his heart. He was a father speaking to his sons – “*and what a father!*”. He passed on what cannot be learned only in theory: passion for Christ and for the poor, the taste of risk for love’s sake, the certainty that Providence never abandons. A missionary is born in this way: from a heart set alight that sets other hearts alight.<sup>13</sup>

For the theme we are developing, it is particularly enlightening to follow this generational thread – Don Orione and Don Mugnai, from the -Father Founder to the son – and to recall a paradigmatic episode from the beginnings of the mission in Bonoua, in Ivory Coast. It all began with Don Mugnai’s desire to encounter the African reality “up close”. In his diary he notes: “*I shall begin to tell from the day when, tired, thirsty and sweating, after a long journey through various villages, I stopped near field. On arriving in the villages, the first to run to meet us were the children.*” One day, however, a detail caught his eye: a boy did not run, but remained seated on the ground; then, seeing the missionary, he dragged himself with hands and knees until disappearing into a hut. That gesture, apparently insignificant, posed a great question. In the following days the child did not appear again. Don Mugnai became more attentive and discovered that it was not an isolated case: other children behaved in the same way.

The truth that emerged was bitter: disabled children, marked by polio or congenital malformations, hidden not out of cruelty but out of fear and distorted religious interpretations: “punishment”, “curse”. It was a reality woven of pain, lack of health education, cultural tradition and social shame. Don Mugnai did not react with harshness or judgement: he reflected, prayed, sought advice. He looked for a way that could open a future.

After reading reality, the answer took the simple and brilliant form of concrete charity: wheelchairs, pushchairs, crutches. Humble signs, supported by solidarity arriving from afar, from Genoa, in a container. Small instruments, yet capable of changing a mentality. One Sunday Don Mugnai has a child affected by polio brought to church in a wheelchair. He wrote: “*The astonishment of the community at the entrance into the Church of the little boy in a wheelchair is still before my eyes.*”

He had spoken beforehand with the elders and prepared the ground. At the altar he announced a liberating truth: not curse, but illness; not punishment, but fragility to be cared for and accompanied; not exclusion, but integration. And he opened a new vision: that child could go to church, to the market, to school, learn a trade. He could live among us. The people

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<sup>13</sup> Don Roberto Simionato, presenting N. 92 of the *Messaggi*, entitled “Ai tempi di Don Orione”, states: “The education given by Don Orione, rich in fatherhood and at the same time in austerity, in stimuli for holiness, has penetrated deeply into the conscience and hearts of those young people...”. And Don Mugnai confirms it: “He knew how to win our hearts; he knew how to move us especially when he opened his soul to us in ‘Good Night’. Then the barriers fell, the distances fell: it was the ‘father’ (and what a ‘father!’) which revealed itself to his children. In: *Messaggi* n. 92, pag. 52.

understood and applauded. In the following Sundays the churchyard filled with wheelchairs: about twenty young people, not as a show, but as the sign of a cultural passage just begun.

The most eloquent fruit of this “cultural Easter” was expressed by a young man, years later, during the inauguration of the Operating Theatre: “*We used to crawl like snakes; now we stand upright on our prostheses and can look people in the eye. We are finally human beings.*”

Here is the logical and coherent passage: Don Orione had learned to observe reality “up close”, to read it in ecclesial communion, to respond with possible and prophetic works. Don Mugnai, son of this school, did the same: he observed, let himself be questioned by a social wound, discerned, involved the community, acted with creativity, built a future.

Bonoua thus became a “charismatic place”: not a nostalgic reminder of the past, but a source for the future, to rediscover the fervour of the first missionaries who embodied and inculturated Don Orione’s insights. In particular:

- **Closeness and compassion:** to see and feel the need of the other, so that the poor may experience that “Divine Providence is here”;
- **Intelligent reading of reality:** patience in understanding and a simple effective response, capable of transforming situations of fragility, and even culture and society;
- **Enterprising trust in Providence:** seeking support for the mission by building a network of volunteers, benefactors and friends.

These dynamics – closeness and compassion, discernment and creative response – intertwine in many works and activities of the Congregation, yesterday as today. Another historical example is the mission in northern Goiás (Brazil, 1952), where the Orionine presence took the form of a true “architecture of charity”: in every village the church at the centre, and beside it, on one side the school and on the other the dispensary. In that context, to give just one example, emerged the figure of Don Quinto Tonini, formed at the “living” school of Don Orione and trained as a nurse by the International Red Cross: he gave shape to a new charity by preparing a group of volunteers, “*The Samaritans*”, for home visits, reading of social and epidemiological reality, accompaniment of expectant mothers and care for the bedridden sick.

As we see, we have “*a glorious history to remember and to tell*”, but also “*a great history to build*”. Therefore, “*let us look to the future, into which the Spirit projects us to do with us great things with us*” (cf. *Vita Consecrata* 110).

## **Welcoming the proposal of the Observatory of Poverty**

The 15th General Chapter, in Action Line no. 8, gave us a clear mandate: so that the whole Family may respond to the ever new questions from the territory, at all levels an “*Observatory of Poverty*” should be promoted, capable of stimulating and, when necessary, organising new charitable responses.

In 2022, after the publication of the Final Document, a meeting with Provincial Superiors and Delegates allowed us to deepen the proposal and share orientations before the programming assemblies. In the discussion it emerged that it is not always possible to reproduce complex models (such as some structured experiences of Caritas Italiana). Nevertheless, the value of the Observatory was reaffirmed above all of as a formative tool for us religious, so that we do not close ourselves within what we already do, but may learn to read emerging forms of poverty, recognise resources, and take concrete steps towards needs often “*right before our eyes*”.

It was also underlined that the Observatory becomes more effective when it involves lay people and the Charismatic Family, valuing Secretariats and volunteering, and when it networks with what already exists in the territory, especially in collaboration with Diocesan Caritas. Finally, the need for pastoral conversion emerged, especially where parishes prevail, so that they may not restrict themselves to the sphere of worship, but become ever more Orionine: open to the social dimension and attentive to the real wounds of people.

Three years after the Chapter, in October 2025, at the General Assembly's verification of the implementation of Line no. 8 noted that, while numerous charitable initiatives were recorded in situations of emergency, frontier, and matters linked to migrants, the proposal of the Observatory had not yet found widespread organisational resonance: only one Province declared it had implemented it, while another intended to establish local teams in works and parishes.

As we well know, the Assembly of verification also aims to relaunch the Chapter and promote the fulfilment of its dispositions. Therefore, so that the decision on the Observatory of Poverty does not remain on paper, we must start again (cf. Norm 176).

### **“Called to identify ourselves with the heart of God”**

According to Pope Leo XIV, in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *“we must always begin again”* from Exodus 3, from God's revelation to Moses at the burning bush. In that biblical page, as we have already reflected, *“God shows himself attentive to the needs of the poor”*. Therefore, says the Pope, *“we are called to identify ourselves with the heart of God, who is concerned for the needs of his children and especially of the most needy.”*<sup>14</sup> To learn to react to reality as God reacts.

How are we to relaunch the Chapter's proposal with simplicity and determination? Beyond the inspirations that these pages may have awakened, here are some concrete steps:

**1. Return to the indications of the 15th General Chapter**, especially Action Line no. 8: *“A poor lifestyle for the apostolate among the poor”*. Alongside the proposal of the Observatory of Poverty (Proposal A), the Chapter offers further paths to favour our conversion to the cry of the poor:

- **Proposal B (no. 55):** recalls the prophetic choice of a frontier presence already made in some Provinces/Delegations. These new openings should be valued so that the “frontier” becomes a “school” capable of rekindling missionary passion throughout the Province/Delegation. I also asks us to promote experiences where religious can “share the life of the poor”.
- **Proposal C (no. 56):** urges us to design concrete responses to emerging forms of poverty, working in network with the Charismatic Family, with other Institutes and, especially with dioceses. Today's forms of poverty are complex and cannot be faced alone.
- **Proposal D (no. 57):** asks each Religious Community to involve its lay people in identifying a local urgent situation of poverty, for a concrete response, *“in the Orionine style”*.

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<sup>14</sup> Cfr. *Dilexi te* 8. In the text, Pope Leo XIV draws inspiration from a crucial passage in *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 187): *“every Christian and every community is called to be God's instruments for the liberation and promotion of the poor... this supposes that we are docile and attentive to listening to the cry of the poor and helping him.”* Therefore, *“to remain deaf to that cry, when we are God's instruments to listen to the poor, places us outside the will of the Father and his plan”*.

- **Proposal E (no. 58):** stresses the need for every religious to assume a poor lifestyle, asking that this dimension become a constant point of verification in community planning. Don Giulio Cremaschi reminds us: *“To truly understand the poor, one must be the poor! That is the meaning of the strict poverty professed by our Congregation. The rich hardly understand the poor. Don Orione understood the poor because he was born poor, lived poor and died poor!”* This reflection asks of us a revision of life, eliminating the risk of seeing consecration as social or economic advancement. Pope Francis reminds us: *“Priesthood and consecrated life are not instruments of social advancement or career, but a total gift to God and to our brothers and sisters”*.<sup>15</sup>
- 2. Make our parishes true “laboratories of charity”:** Parishes are privileged places to give concreteness to the *Observatory of Poverty*. They have a natural and unique perspective on the territory: daily closeness, networks of relationships, visits to the sick and elderly, listening to families and knowledge of the “silent” poor. They must be actively involved so that the Christian community grows in the ability to read reality and mobilise in choices of charity. It is decisive to support and strengthen charitable groups (parish Caritas, St Vincent, volunteers, home visits...), placing them in a network with the resources already active. Don Orione taught wisely: *“It is our practice always to unite a work of charity to a work of worship.”*<sup>16</sup>. Our parishes must be, not only places of worship, but spaces that see and generate responses to “practise charity”.
- 3. Use the Apostolic Balance Sheet as a tool of verification.** If our Works are to truly listen to the territory and respond charismatically to its appeals, the Apostolic Balance Sheet offers a structured path for verification and growth. Through the values *“Beacons of Faith and Civilisation: pastoral relationship with the territory”* and *“At the forefront of the times”*, the Balance Sheet helps us to discern whether there are spaces to intercept new emergencies (going beyond already institutionalised responses) and to measure our dialogue with local resources.
- 4. Keep initial formation open to “new poverties”:** Our Constitutions clearly indicate that formation is a path of progressive assimilation of the Orionine vocation (art. 99). Therefore, it must remain apostolically open: young religious are called to maintain a living and real contact with the world that will be their future field of mission (art. 101), avoiding the reduction of the formative path to a protected environment separated from the life of the people. To this end, our itinerary provides for the “placement” in a work, as immediate contact with the characteristic apostolate of the Congregation (art. 102). Study too is never an end in itself but must harmonise speculation with the practical sense of life’s problems (art. 106), forming religious capable of reading reality with evangelical intelligence. For those on the path towards priesthood, preparation for ministry cannot be limited to catechesis and liturgy but must include “works of charity in an essential way” (art. 108). Therefore, it is necessary to place alongside study and sacramental life stable and verifiable experiences of service to the poor.
- 5. “Observatory Moment”:** Provincial and Delegation Councils could dedicate a meeting, or part of it, to an *“Observatory of Poverty Moment”*. It will be a time dedicated to reading the province/delegation reality by answering essential questions: Which cries are most urgent and “before our eyes”? Where is our presence called to conversion (in style, in form, in priorities)? Which concrete steps are possible? Is an intervention of the Council necessary to

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<sup>15</sup> Don Cremaschi's words are referred to in: Messages n. 36, page 28. Those of Pope Francis were pronounced on March 28, 2014 in a meeting with the Bishops of Madagascar.

<sup>16</sup> In: *Scritti* 53, 39; Anche: *Parola* 3, 148: *“Where a work of worship stands we must unite a work of charity”*.

support some local presence? How can local realities be motivated to organise some team for a work of Observation? This same dynamic of discernment could also be reproduced within each single local Community or Work of charity.

**Dearest Confreres,**

in a sermon of 1939 Don Orione asked himself: *“What does it mean to marry poverty?”* And at once he directs the answer towards evangelical radicality: *“Does it perhaps mean to marry poverty theoretically? Does it mean to take a vow of poverty? More! Does it mean to practise poverty? More! Does it mean to remain attached to poverty? More! More! More!”*. And then he focuses on what is essential: *“To marry poverty means to make one’s life a holocaust for the poor, for the humble, for lepers...”*, because *“we are called to consecrate our life for the poorest people, for so many afflicted and rejected brothers of ours...”*.<sup>17</sup>

Don Orione brings us to the roots: poverty is not “married” with speeches, but with a life that allows itself to be consumed by love; not by a theoretical union, but by a real closeness capable of becoming incarnate in the wounds of the abandoned. It is here that our charism rediscovers its centre: when the poor do not remain at the margins of our sensitivity, but become the criterion of our priorities, of our pastoral care, of our lifestyle.

The “Observatory of Poverty”, therefore, must be understood above all as a tool to educate and orient the heart, so that the Chapter’s dream may be realised: *“A Religious Family which increasingly passes from works of charity to the practice of charity, which places ever greater emphasis on a poor way of life among the poor that gives credibility to our mission”*, leaving behind *“our comforts in order to face new realities in the image of Christ”*.

Only a gaze educated by the Eucharist and by familiarity with people frees us from the risk of a merely “institutionalised” charity and, today, also from the subtle danger of isolating ourselves within a “virtual” reality, made up of impressions, narratives and debates that no longer touch the flesh. Observation and contact with people and with the territory restore concreteness: the poor are not an idea nor a category, but faces, stories, wounds and real hopes. This return to reality gives us the courage to *“throw ourselves into the fire of new times”* with creativity and boldness.

I entrust our dreams to Divine Providence and to the intercession of Saint Luigi Orione, *“father of the poor and distinguished benefactor of suffering and abandoned humanity”*, that he may grant us a free and poor heart, capable truly of seeing and loving.

Faternally,

  
**P. Tarcísio G. Vieira**  
Direttore generale



<sup>17</sup> In: *Lo Spirito di Don Orione*, Vol. V, pag. 79-80