



Speech: **THE INTERNATIONAL AOS STATUTE: COOPERATE TO GROW**

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**Conclusion**

We think that the international AOS Statute has welcomed effectively the choice of service, to the world and to the Church, lived personally by Monsignor Luigi Novarese because of his illness. That's the reason why Monsignor Novarese decided to suggest a particular mission to all sufferers. Founding the AOS and the Silent workers of the Cross, Mon. Luigi Novarese wanted to perpetuate a very important service for the life of the Church. Sharing Luigi Novarese's choice of life and accepting his vocation to be God's son, the person marked by pain can undertake a path to faith, moved by a spirituality of communion with Christ, through self-gift for everybody's salvation. The suffering person is called to be "a worker in the Lord's vineyard": an active presence in a pastoral, concrete, visible action.

Monsignor Luigi Novarese's choice of apostolate derives just from the experience of a personal and deep path. All that we feel as really constitutive of the human experience, is considered universal too, common to everybody, present in the innumerable varieties of difference. Looking at this universal peculiarity of the human suffering, we can find out the existence of two indispensable elements to put International Confederation AOS Statute into practice: unity and diversity. The balance between these two elements is indispensable to let our Confederation work well and the next Council of Presidency will be obliged to follow this important rule to orientate its operative choices. In the articles 2 (Aim) and 3 (Activity) the Statute suggests, for the confederate associations, all that each diocesan CVS shares with each member. All that is essential for the identity, the unitary element, is kept quite widely by article 2, not to mortify the other essential element : diversity. The latter realizes the only ideal in different ways, opening to the numerous requirements that the worldwide mission of our apostolate demands. The article concerning the activity (art.3) gives us practical directions about the International Confederation AOS' way to achieve this aim, which joins all the associations belonging to it. In the light of these two previous statements (art.2/3) the other articles of the Statute give practical indications useful to the International Confederation AOS to attain the end it was born for.

**The universality of Monsignor Luigi Novarese's Intuition**

In his own experience of life, the founder of the AOS Monsignor Luigi Novarese understood an important task for every suffering person: cooperate to the salvation. The universal scale of this task concerns: the personal situations ( "the suffering with thousand faces" the Vatican II speaks of); globalism ( the totality of the peoples).

Monsignor Luigi Novarese 's life was marked , at a young age, by an invalidating illness. So our founder lived personally the nonsense of pain, the frustration of disability, the effort of acceptance, but at the same time he felt the need to find a way to overcome suffering, delivering his own life from the weight of pain. Luigi Novarese felt bound to share his personal experience with others and to let others know the choices the faith offered him in reply to his questions about the meaning of life. His vocational choice, to be a priest, must be considered the first step towards this direction. He thought, in fact, that priesthood could be a necessary support to the

suffering persons' path to faith . Afterwards he decided to create an associative reality which had the same urgent aim he felt. This same urgency, felt by the founder, still calls all those who have accepted the same mission: to evangelize the wide world of human suffering. That is how we consider the first universal dimension of Novarese's charisma, as "universality of the situations": the suffering with thousand faces" (see Message of the Council Vatican II to the poor, to the sick persons and to all those who suffer, 8 December 1865). Actually, the apostolate started by Luigi Novarese, was addressed not to a single category of suffering persons, distinguishable according to the causes of the painful situation: physical, psychic and sensorial disabilities and so on. The apostolic ideal, to be with the suffering person along his path, is offered to everybody, both healthy and sick persons. So it is possible to know how suffering can involve the person as a whole; suffering demands deep answers able to satisfy this expectation in full, not only in its single clinical aspects.

The second universal dimension of Luigi Novarese's charisma deals with the totality of the peoples and nations. In the 1960s Monsignor Novarese himself felt the need, connatural to every ecclesiastical apostolate, to introduce himself at an international level. The founder entrusted his wish to a project called "the world union of the sick persons"<sup>1</sup>. In 1965, the Holy Father expressed his will to create such an initiative. The project concerned the union, for a common programme, of the organizations working with the sick persons. The single institutions would maintain their name and purposes , opening a mutual constructive and qualifying dialogue. The reply of the Holy See (by a letter of the Secretariat of State) was positive as far as the weight of the initiative but it cautiously delayed its realization, because it was considered inopportune at that time and in that way, considering the numerous institutions and international catholic organizations already in existence. There are at least three aspects, as to the world union of the sick persons, we must consider. The first two ones deal with the universal mission as a native and unavoidable task of the Church and of all realities it is composed of. The third one, of organizing character, points out some concrete ways to embody this missionary yearning. All these aspects are well received and fulfilled by the International AOS Confederation.

The universality of the suffering and the need to offer an effective answer to sufferers' questions, cause us to join everywhere and at any time the mission of our apostolate. Qualifying better and better the essential and peculiar elements of the associative identity, will be of great benefit in order to be able to address to everybody without compromises, free from superfluous conditionings. So it will be possible to announce the evangelical message in a believable and useful way inside the different cultures, among the present-day man's innumerable situations.

The International Confederation looks at this missionary horizon giving a legal and organizing support potentially of great efficacy, a right instrument to support and direct the associative path of AOS towards a completed internationality. The choice of such institution was born, in fact, from the necessity to connect effectively the strengths engaged in the same apostolate, assuring a certain autonomy at a diocesan level, in the different countries. A precious resource, which increase the universal significance of the apostolate of the Confederation, is given by the possibility to cooperate with institutions which don't belong to the Confederation ( belonging or not to the Catholic Church, whatever religious creed or even non-sectarian).

## **The internationality of AOS, among expectations, plans and fulfilments: The International AOS Confederation.**

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<sup>1</sup> *The world union of the sick persons*

What is it? It's the agreement of all the sufferers of the world to the same work plan in order to assert more and more the human dignity of the suffering persons and the saviour mission of pain sanctified by the Grace.

The aim of this union is to link all the sufferers to the Virgin, Mater Ecclesiae, so that at the school of this very high Mother they may learn to sanctify pain following the divine example of Jesus Christ...

Means. The Apostles of the Suffering will establish a fraternal relationship with all the suffering brothers based on charity and truth to realize such a world union. ( Silent Workers of the Cross Archives, document of 1968)

Let us consider together the different groups the founder wanted to define on the basis of the differences between laymen and priests, the sick and the healthy. This plan and the first realizations were already directed in search of a balance between unitariness and differences, according to the directions offered by the canon law code of 1917. The present legal configuration (the Confederation) is consistent with Monsignor Luigi Novarese's initial idea, placing itself in an original way inside the legal frame of the canon law code of 1983.

In may 1943, Father Luigi Novarese began to organize a group of priests engaged in a pastoral action able to realize the requests of the Holy Virgin in Lourdes and Fatima. Step by step there was also an active involvement of believers: laymen, sick and healthy persons, linked by the same apostolate. Among them the founder felt, later, the necessity to define with the name of Silent Workers of the Cross a further group of persons. It was, in fact, necessary to assure the continuity of the work through a radical engagement in the devotion to the apostolate, expressed through the profession of the evangelical councils and "the consecration" to the Virgin. Two different groups were created: the AOS and the Silent Workers of the Cross. Only the latter was legally established, both ecclesiastically and civilly. Later an important step towards the definition of the relationship between these two groups was made thanks to the issuing of a papal decree called "Valde probandae". This document has become an important legal reference picture in the relationships between the Silent Workers of the Cross and the AOS. The former were defined as "pious primary union" (according to the "old" canon law code), the second as "associations". In this way the Holy See decree placed the Silent Workers of the Cross as a reference point for all diocesan realities which would have risen, recognizing themselves in the spirituality and apostolate described in the document.

The papal text mentions in short some distinctions, as regards the belonging, which are based on being clergymen, laymen, healthy or sick persons. In the same papal document and then in the historical evolution of the different groups, the leading element has been however the unitary one, giving less importance to distinctions. On the contrary the reality of the Silent Workers of the Cross was definitely seen in a unitary prospect: "this association- the papal brief records- gathers together priests and laymen, healthy and sick persons".

In the next development, the three associations have assumed, according to the papal brief "Valde probandae", a diocesan dimension and the name of AOS (for the most part of cases, mostly without mentioning the three associations provided by the papal brief). Two are the elements to consider: first, the diocesan territoriality of the AOS associations; secondly the unitariness in the recognition of the three associations: "Apostles of the Suffering", "Brothers of the sick persons", "Sacerdotal Marian Association", gathered into a single name AOS. The situation provided the presence of AOS in the single dioceses, obtaining some acknowledgement by the Bishop and carrying out an activity of apostolate according to the directions from the General Direction of the Silent Workers of the Cross. All this without a Statute or a stable regulations which led its development. The situation became in substance steady and it was protracted till 1998, when the General Assembly of the Silent Workers of the Cross approved a Statute for the diocesan AOS. One must probably admit, considering that long period of time, that some uncertainties (due to the lack of a statute) and a certain leading centralism can have weighted heavily on the diffusion of the organization and on the deepening of the apostolic experience. Practical necessities of administrative management and connatural opportunities to the course of the apostolic activity in an organised form, have later supported the reconfiguration of the relationships between the Silent Workers of the Cross and the diocesan AOS. These necessities have kept up with the inevitable legal replacement of the Silent Workers of the Cross association, in the cadres drawn out by the canon law code of 1983. Step by step, with ways of internal reflection and conferences in the papal offices, the decision, to shape the Silent Workers of the Cross as a reality of consecrated life (profession of the evangelic councils), to define as separate diocesan realities the local AOS and to entrust the general unitariness and the coordination of the legal form of the confederation, has taken shape.

A “way” to get together the Silent Workers of the Cross and the different diocesan AOS centres (in Italy and in the world), promoting a certain autonomy and avoiding extreme and internal regulations.

This synthetic re-reading of the legal course made by the AOS let us find, in the International AOS Confederation, not only an answer to an objective necessity, but also the coherent development of Monsignor Luigi Novarese’s thought, guaranteed once by the papal brief of the Holy See.

Therefore there are, among the characteristics of the Confederation, some constitutive elements of a certain “freedom of movement”, whom we have to place side by side the “reliability of the directions”, which concerns the necessary “balance” of the diocesan autonomy of the confederate associations. In fact we don’t create disconnected realities, without a past and with any future, but we fix the coordinate parts of a single great project, which Monsignor Luigi Novarese placed under the Silent Workers of the Cross’ direction.

In the faithfulness at the characteristics established by the founder and in the unitariness of the coordination, we may find the necessary elements to assure safety along the path, to give constantly each confederate association leading authoritative and sure outlines, with a suitable, formative, leading support. Thus the international AOS Confederation reveals itself to be an instrument fully in accordance with the founder’s project and with the new ecclesiastical demands.

### **Vocation and mission of the laymen and meaning of pain: the gift of evangelization.**

Let us read the aim (art.2) and the activities (art.3) of the international AOS Confederation. A task of evangelization is described, according to a specific charisma, which is confirmed and fostered by the papal magisterium . They are directions which define an apostolate characterized by a clear identity (in the contents and ways) able to “become incarnate” in every socio-ecclesiastical context.

In the articles 2 and 3 of the Statute of the international AOS Confederation we can find in brief the two elements we are concerning with: identity and common elements which characterize it; ability of spreading in diversity. The charismatic and operative closeness of the Silent Workers of the Cross and of AOS, received and organised in the confederative structure, let us speak about some peculiar elements of the Silent Workers of the Cross, to enlighten the spirituality synthetically acknowledged in art. 2. The “Easter” and “Marian” dimensions, mentioned in the aim of the international AOS Confederation, are stated in the “note on spirituality” of the statute of the Silent Workers of the Cross with reference to Mary’s biblical icon at the foot of the Cross (John 19, 25-27). We are invited to look at her to understand the theological and spiritual dimension of our own mission to announce salvation and hope. The main characteristic of this synthesis between the Easter mystery and the Marian reference, is the entrusting to the Virgin according to Saint Luigi Grignon de Monfort’s teaching. Jesus from the Cross shows the new dimension of Mary’s motherhood, in the economy of the salvation, as the woman who accompanies the disciples’ way.

It follows a style, a way of living and animate the sufferers’ apostolic path which suggests to share that consolation and that courageous impulse of the announcement, that Most Holy Mary lived. Such maternal attitudes of the Holy Virgin are usually proposed again in the apparitions, in a form brought up-to-date to the different socio-ecclesiastical contexts. Therefore the element which is mostly offered to us as a style of apostolate, is that of a dynamic faithfulness to the history of man in his different situations of life. The activities shown in the article3, let us look at what the Confederation concretely will have to operate. This is the article which must take us in the reading of the remaining part of the Statute, where the technical directions prevail. They are directions which allow concretely to act, defining who decides, what must be decided and how the decision must be realized and examined. From the “patrimonial estate” to the “term of the offices” all take part in the efficacy of our Confederation to reach its

aims. A special attention must be given to the procedures established by the General Assembly (art.8) and to the directive task of the Council of Presidency (art. 10). The article 8 provides some rules to carry out the national sessions of the assembly itself, so it is possible to involve directly all the confederate associations, represented by their own head. The article 10 entrusts the growth and the dynamism of the international AOS Confederation to the President and counsellors' creative wisdom.

From these premises and the universal horizon that we have considered connatural to every authentic ecclesiastical path, a great confluence of the Silent Workers of the Cross and the diocesan AOS was born. The common aim is to realize a complete and organic pastoral for a spirituality of communion with Christ crucified and risen, for the spreading of the apostolate for the appreciation of the suffering person in the universality of the peoples and of the existences. An apostolate in which every single person disabled or suffering, in virtue of her own baptism, is called to be a missionary, according to the full meaning of the word, not only as a spiritual presence in the necessities of the world, but as an active protagonist, physically and personally engaged to work a pastoral, concrete, effective action.