

Historical journey of the Society of Saint Paul

Essential retrospective look on the journey of the Congregation

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The period of the Foundation (from 1914 to 1957)

Right from the start Fr. James Alberione is the father who nourishes the Society of Saint Paul and the nascent Pauline Family on both the material and spiritual plane. He carries out his teaching role by means of the word and example and develops the Pauline charism through the concrete collaboration of his sons and daughters who enter “the house.” The Pauline works are always born in Bethlehem, that is, in the most squalid poverty, but confiding in divine help. The foundation of 20 August 1914 is realized when Fr. Alberione not only is without money, but has a debt of 70 lire.

Everybody does everything with enthusiasm and the Founder builds the “wonderful Pauline Family” transmitting into it the incredible novelty of an apostolate unexpected by the Church, making use momentarily of the good press, understood as preaching of the Word of God and announcement that transmits salvation to souls.

At his side is Can. Francesco Chiesa, his professor and spiritual director, and the first Pauline priest, Fr. Timothy Giaccardo. On the first magazine founded in Alba in 1918, *l'Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa*, they present a theoretical formulation, besides a practical realization, of the Pauline apostolate.

Fr. Alberione during night prays and during the day goes to various communities and gives the meditation or lessons of every type and for every level. To the clerics he teaches philosophy and theology. In the first generation whether male or female there emerge an extraordinary creativity and dynamism. If the houses become overcrowded, transfer is decided. Space is given to ever more functional printing machines: the first *linotype* is greeted like a cathedral of evangelization; a trip is made to Berlin by plane to order the first rotary machine because there is no time to lose.

The same spirit accompanies the start of the foundations. The first, in 1926, has for objective Rome, close to the Pope, near the Basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls, halfway between the tomb and the place of martyrdom of the Apostle. The true contagion of foundation explodes at the start of the 30's, when the first missionaries leave for Latin America: Brazil and Argentina. Then follow the foundations in the Far East: Japan, China, Philippines. Other confreres reach France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland.

The Pauline Family becomes the center of production with full cycle: from the authors to the producers to the propagandists, among whom the Daughters of Saint Paul stand out for their dynamism and hardworking ethic.

In 1938 the charism becomes richer with other means of social communication. Besides books and magazines, cinema appears, through the production *Abuna Messias* which wins at the Festival of Venice and receives the Mussolini Cup. Then follow a numerous group of films produced in-house or reduced to 16mm with very good success. In the 50's, recovering from the ruins of war, the radio apostolate is born and develops not without hard work. Divine help is assured. The Founder does not tire of repeating the promises that the Divine Master

has revealed to him at the beginning of the 20's during a moment of particular difficulty: "*Do not be afraid, I am with you. From here I want to enlighten. Be sorry for your sins.*"

For what concerns the canonical aspect, the Congregation obtains the diocesan approval on 12 March 1927 from the Bishop of Alba, Mons. Giuseppe Francesco Re, and the definitive papal approval on 27 June 1949 from His Holiness Pius XII.

I General Chapter (1957)

It is the Chapter of the consolidation of the Congregation from the juridical point of view. Several times announced and postponed, also because of the post-war difficulties, it is held in Albano Laziale (Rome) from 4 to 16 April 1957 under the presidency of Fr. James Alberione. "It dealt with taking stock, the Founder writes, of forty-three years of life. The Chapter has made a good examination about its spirit, and has approved it by means of Brothers representing Brothers... The spirit with which the Congregation has been born and has grown has received its definitive seal. Other successive Chapters will have the task of making grow the good tree, planted along the course of the Eucharistic waters: they will gather other abundant fruits" (*San Paolo*, April 1957; cf *CISP*, p. 158).

In the afternoon of 11 April 1957, the capitulars unanimously elect Fr. James Alberione as Superior General of the Society of Saint Paul. He will remain in office until 5 August 1969.

Three years after the General Chapter, in April 1960, takes place the most important Pauline international meeting: for the first time are gathered in Ariccia (Rome) 126 Paulines selected from among the more elderly brothers of all the Circumscriptions for a *special Course of spiritual exercises lasting a month*, that the Primo Maestro has thought as a time for "updating of the life of each one and of the houses according to the Constitutions" (*San Paolo*, August-September 1959; cf *CISP*, p. 195).

From 18 May to 2 June 1966 the Primo Maestro, according to the Constitutions, convokes in Ariccia all the Provincial and Regional Superiors "to deal with, together with the officials of the General Curia, matters of greater importance regarding the Society." Among "the matters of greater importance," he enumerates the following: 1) Examine if the dispositions of the General Chapter (1957) have been applied in the Provinces and in the Regions. 2) Examination of the Conciliar Decree of Vatican II: *The accommodated renewal of religious life*. 3) Our Constitutions, according to the letter and the spirit. 4) Examination of the Directory (prepared in 1947, and now updated). - The *San Paolo* (June-July 1966) has the report of this first intercapitular Meeting "postponed for after the Ecumenical Council Vatican II in the event that some new disposition might be given" and "celebrated with fervor and Pauline joy" (cf *CISP*, pp. 212-222).

The General Chapter (1969-1971)

It is the Chapter of renewal, "special" and "ordinary," following the dispositions emanating from Vatican II Council. It is held in Ariccia in two long sessions with an interval of more than a year between one and the other. The presence of the Founder is not continuous, but intermittent, due to his precarious health; in fact he will pass away on 26 novembre 1971. The capitular preparation is quite long (with an extensive survey among all the members of the Congregation) and the elaboration of five "documents" comes out to be very laborious: after an initial phase of conferences dealing with information and methodology, the five commis-

sions work for three months at successive redactions of “End and members,” “Spirituality and religious life,” “Apostolate,” “Formation,” “Government and administration.”

The first “special” session takes place from 22 April to 2 August 1969; a brief “ordinary” session follows from 4 to 6 August. On 5 August 1969 the capitulars elect as Superior General of the Society of Saint Paul Fr. Luigi Damaso Zanoni and proclaim the Founder as “Superior General emeritus for life.” His first successor will remain in office until 1 July 1975.

The drafts of the documents elaborated during the first session and translated into several languages are sent to the communities. In the greater part of them, during the year 1970, an intense animation, study and debate is made; observations are gathered in view of definitive redaction which takes place during the second “special” session, fixed from 1 April to 2 July 1971. For the first time we can have in our hands and use the succinct but very rich charismatic autobiography then with the title *Io sono con voi* (I am with you), the present *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae* (The abundant riches of his grace) and many other writings of the Founder. With these aids – adding the conciliar doctrine and the doctrine on religious-apostolic life, as well as the experience made by the Founder himself and by his first disciples during the establishment phase of the work – it is possible to explain the charismatic bases of the Congregation.

At the conclusion of the Chapter a commission is constituted with the task to draft the new text of the Constitutions-Directory based on the content of the Documents. It is submitted to the General Government at the end of 1971 and it is made up of a doctrinal-charismatic part (“Rule of life” or true and proper Constitutions) and of a juridical part (Directory). The Congregation for the Religious appreciates the text, but does not approve it because it wants that the charismatic section and the juridical one be integrated into one text. If it approves the entire thing, the successive General Chapters will not be able to modify even the Directory without the approval of the Holy See.

On 19 June 1971, by decision of the “Special” General Chapter, the *Pauline Center of Spirituality* (CSP) is established at the service of the Congregation and the entire Pauline Family.

The intercapitular Assembly of the Congregation takes place in Ariccia from 1 to 24 May 1973. Taking part there are the Superior General Fr. Luigi Zanoni, the General Council and the General Officials, the Provincial and Regional Superiors.

The III General Chapter (1975)

It is celebrated in Ariccia from 25 May to 12 July 1975. The most demanding work is that of approving the text of the Constitutions and Directory, taking into account the observations advanced by the then SCRIS (Sacred Congregation for the Religious and the Secular Institutes). Also, being elaborated are “Programmatic choices” on themes regarding the four wheels: consecration and prayer, vocations and formation, apostolate and organization — even on the international level, — government and administration. The Constitutions-Directory, presented to the Holy See, are approved “ad experimentum” for nine years, according to the iter established then by the documents of application of Vatican II.

On 1 July 1975 Fr. Raffaele Tonni is elected Superior General of the Congregation. He is the second successor of the Founder and will stay in office until 24 March 1980.

From 10 to 23 May 1978 takes place in Alba the intercapitular Assembly. Present are the Superior General Fr. Raffaele Tonni, the General Council and the General Officials, the Provincial and Regional Superiors. Patronized by the Special General Chapter (cf *Acts*, nn. 113 and

576), the International Pauline Studio of Social Communications (=SPICS) founded on 22 May 1975 and now ratified in programmatic choice n. 11, in **1980** starts its first full year of teaching.

IV General Chapter (1980)

The celebration of the Chapter, anticipated for about a year because of the illness of the Superior General, takes place in Ariccia from 24 February to 13 April 1980. The preparation comes out to be a little hurried and the works start with some difficulty.

In the Chapter the Pauline “ideal” is taken as a point of reference, in the manner described by Fr. Alberione, and starting from that point are defined some priority objectives, the operative lines (about consecration, the community, Paulinity and the apostolate) and the moments of verification. Also approved are some changes in the Directory, based on the suggestions coming from the brothers after the years of experimentation and based on the two “motions” (priest-disciple relation, houses of apostolate with a special statute). Complying then with a disposition of the SCRIS regarding the definitive redaction of the Constitutions-Directory, the General Government is delegated to constitute a special Commission. The Constitutions-Directory are definitively approved by the Holy See on 4 April 1984.

Fr. Renato Perino, the third successor of the Founder, is elected Superior General on 24 March 1980. The office will be renewed for him during the V General Chapter on 19 March 1986.

From 4 to 29 April 1983 the intercapitular Assembly is held in Alba, composed of the Superior General Fr. Renato Perino, the General Council and the General Councilors, the Provincial and Regional Superiors.

From 16 to 27 September 1984 in Ariccia is celebrated the seminar “At the center is Jesus Christ the Way, the Truth, the Life,” organized by the *Center of Pauline Spirituality* (CSP). The Acts are gathered in the volume: “The Christocentric inheritance of Fr. Alberione.”

V General Chapter (1986)

The theme chosen for this Chapter, which is celebrated in Ariccia from 28 February to 27 March 1986, is the following: “Stir up a process of participation in the renewal of the Pauline mission to answer the actual challenges of evangelization, in a vocational perspective.” As frame of reference is the papal exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* in the tenth anniversary of its promulgation. Being provided beforehand is a packed “instrument of work,” that includes a series of texts of said exhortation and in addition others taken from the capitular Documents 1969-71, and a copious questionnaire to be studied and to answer as a community.

Through the results received (coming by 89% from the communities and by 93% from the members) the capitulars try to make a diagnosis about Pauline evangelization, also considering the principal challenges, and elaborate four priorities for the plan of action of six years at various levels: general, circumscriptional and local: a) deepen the charism in community; b) imprint a formative impulse that is integral and permanent, oriented more decisively toward our mission; c) favor inculturation; d) assume the vocation dimension as an element of personal and communitarian growth, indispensable for a vocation proposal.

On 19 March 1986 Fr. Renato Perino is reelected Superior General. He will guide the Congregation until 3 April 1992.

As natural development of the theme of mission, from 17 September to 2 October 1988 there is held in the seats of Ariccia and Milan the “International Seminar of Pauline Editors” and successively on 18 November 1988 the CTIA (*International Technical Committee for the Apostolate*) is constituted at the service of the General Government.

Making itself urgent is the necessity to realize a *single logo*, at world level, for all the apostolic products of the Congregation. The date 25 December 1991 marks the launch of the new trademark, which the VII General Chapter will also assume as the institutional symbol.

Of equal urgency is the need to coordinate the apostolic activities within every Circumscription and on the geographic-linguistic level. Appearing are the Pauline editors of Europe, of CIDEP (*Ibero-american Center of Pauline Editors*) and of CAP-ESW (*Conference of Asia Pacific and English Speaking World*).

The intercapitular Assembly, the first one outside of Italy, takes place in Cidade Paulina, in the periphery of São Paulo (Brazil), from 1 to 16 April 1989. In it is approved the *Ratio formationis*, urged by the Chapter and published ad experimentum on 26 February 1990.

The beatification of Fr. Giuseppe Timothy Giaccardo, the first Pauline priest and the first Blessed of the Congregation and the Pauline Family, marks in a significant way the period of six years on the congregational and ecclesial level. Pope John Paul II proclaims him Blessed on 22 October 1989.

The VI General Chapter (1992)

It is held in Ariccia from 15 March to 16 April 1992. The preparation has consisted above all in a survey about the theme “The Pauline, a man of communication,” to which 68% of the members has responded. The answers have then been tabulated and analyzed in a numerical-statistical reading and in an interpretative reading. In a report on the state of the Congregation, the Superior General presents a wide-ranging panorama about our Pauline history with proposals for the near future. The study commissions formulate three priorities and the consequent operative lines on all levels (general, circumscriptional, local) around these themes: a) the Pauline, a man of communication; b) a community of communicators; c) the single mission of communicating the Gospel.

The fourth successor of the Founder as Superior General of the Society of Saint Paul is Fr. Silvio Pignotti, elected on 3 April 1992. He will stay in office until 5 May 1998.

Among the tasks entrusted by the Chapter to the new General Government stand out: 1) to give some directions for an apostolic coordination on the national and international level (the Government provides for this through the document “On the subject of the 3rd priority,” 16 December 1992); 2) the organization of an international Seminar on Formation (held from 12 to 23 October 1994; the Acts and the Final Document are published on 19 March 1995); 3) the redaction of a Manual of Authority; 4) the organization of an international Seminar on “Jesus Master” (held from 14 to 24 October 1996; the Acts “Jesus Master yesterday, today and always” and the Final Document are published in February of 1997).

The intercapitular Assembly takes place in El Hatillo, in the periphery of Caracas (Venezuela) from 2 to 13 May 1995. In it is approved the *Manual of Authority* redacted upon request of the Chapter and published ad experimentum on 19 March 1996.

The VII General Chapter (1998)

It is the last celebrated in the XX century. It takes place in Ariccia from 15 April to 15 May 1998 and it is presided over by a papal Delegate, Mons. Antonio Buoncristiani, Bishop of Porto and Santa Rufina, whose presence is explained due to the conflicts that have arisen within the Congregation.

The course of the Chapter highlights the predominance of a strong sense of congregational unity and at the same time the awareness of having to study in depth and reread in the complex reality of today the charismatic inheritance transmitted to us by the Founder. The four priorities and the corresponding operative lines elaborated by the Chapter reflect this commitment of deepening, cohesion, integrality and actuality. After having examined the congregational reality in light of the Chapter theme “Your parish is the world” and the expectations of the Church and contemporary society, the VII General Chapter makes its own and proposes to bring to execution the general objective: “Assume decisively the universality of our mission, accelerating first of all a change of mentality and attitude on the part of all the members.” During the Chapter, in fact, there prevails in an implicit or manifest way this basic postulate of dynamic fidelity: every renewal must start from the person, from his mentality, from his formation.

On 5 May 1998 resulting elected as Superior General of the Society of Saint Paul is Fr. Pietro Campus, the fifth successor of the Founder. He will remain in office until 10 May 2004. The Congregation reacquires its legitimate autonomy and is reactivated in its life as provided for in the *Constitutions and Directory*.

The intercapitular Assembly takes place in New Delhi (India) from 26 February to 10 March 2001. As a natural development of the theme of mission and, specifically, of the elaboration of a congregational apostolic project declared “undelayable” by the Assembly, the CTIA calls the first international meeting of the General Directors of the Apostolate of the Circumscriptions of the Congregation, with the aim of reflecting on the theme: “The Pauline, a single multimedia editor.” The meeting is carried out in Ariccia from 30 April to 5 May 2001.

The most significant event of this six-year period for the Society of Saint Paul and for the entire Pauline Family takes place in St. Peter’s Plaza on 27 April 2003, when Fr. James Alberione is declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II.

The VIII General Chapter (2004)

It is the first Chapter of the new millennium and it is celebrated in Ariccia from 20 April to 20 May 2004. It is prepared with care by the sending and elaboration of the data of a questionnaire sent to all the Paulines and by an *Instrument of work* on the theme “To be saint Paul living today. A Congregation that strains forward.”

The capitular Assembly examines the reality of the Institute, analyses the expectations of the Church and of the society in the present-day circumstances and the future prospects and approves the Final Document whose general objective is thus formulated: “Intensify, as individuals and community, the experience of Christ, in the way lived by the apostle Paul, interpreted and handed down to us by blessed James Alberione, so as to announce to all peoples the Word of salvation using the most suitable languages for the present-day culture of communication.” It inspires the contents and the lines of action of the five areas that articulate the Document: spirituality and community life; promotion and formation; apostolate; poverty,

service of authority, administration; Pauline Family (accompanied by a specific capitular declaration). Also redacted is the preferential apostolic option (*To make human in order to Christianize*), and finally merits special mention the deliberation on the “Manual of authority,” which closes the period of ad experimentum, making it normative through the new title *Service of authority in the SSP, Manual*.

On 10 May 2004, the Capitulars elect as Superior General of the Society of Saint Paul Fr. Silvio Sassi, the sixth successor of the Founder.

The principal stages which cadence in succession the application of some provisions of the Chapter, are the following:

- The second international Meeting of the General Directors of the Apostolate of the Circumscriptions of the Congregation, which takes place in Ariccia from 9 to 15 October 2006 upon convocation by the CTIA. The purpose is that of reflecting on the strategies to manage better the apostolic organization and deepen the editorial lines of the Congregation (approved on 16 November 2005).
- The intercapitular Assembly in Cuernavaca (Mexico) from 16 to 29 April 2007. In it, among other things, the General Government is suggested to gather the most significant texts of the successors of blessed James Alberione: Fr. Luigi **Zanoni** (1969-1975), Fr. Raffaele **Tonni** (1975-1980), Fr. Renato **Perino** (1980-1992), Fr. Silvio **Pignotti** (1992-1998) and Fr. Pietro **Campus** (1998-2004) so as to put at the disposal of the Paulines the contribution that the individual Superior Generals have offered to the “straining forward” of the Pauline charism. The texts can be found in the official site of the Congregation www.paulus.net, with the title: “*Documenti dei successori di Don Alberione (two volumes)*”.
- The constitution of the SIF (*International Secretariat for Vocation Pastoral and Formation*) on 25 January 2008, followed by, from 14 to 21 September 2008 in Ariccia, the first international Meeting of the General Coordinators of Vocation Pastoral and Formation of the Circumscriptions of the Congregation.
- The two important events: the *International Seminar on the Pauline Charism*, from 17 June to 3 July 2008 in Ariccia, and the *International Seminar on Saint Paul*, also in Ariccia from 19 to 29 April 2009. Ad essi, per felice coincidenza, fa da cornice l’Anno Paolino, 28 giugno 2008 - 29 giugno 2009, voluto da papa Benedetto XVI per commemorare il bimillenario della nascita di San Paolo.
- Il primo Incontro internazionale dei Delegati degli Istituti paolini di vita secolare consacrata, dal 12 al 18 settembre 2009 ad Ariccia.
- In tanto si è avuto il trasloco della Sede generalizia da Via della Fanella a quella precedente di Alessandro Severo, dove visse per lunghi anni il Fondatore.

IX Capitolo generale (2010)

Nella prospettiva dell’imminente Centenario della Congregazione, era stato scelto un tema molto impegnativo, nel segno di una crescita dinamica: “**Ravviva il dono che hai ricevuto. La fedeltà creativa a cent’anni del carisma paolino**”, in base al quale si è elaborato un questionario di una trentina di domande, cui ha risposto il 65% dei paolini (649 sul totale di 1000 membri). Le risposte sono state rielaborate e raccolte in un fascicolo con un riassunto per Circoscrizioni, un’analisi delle singole domande, una lettura degli elementi comuni (anche alla luce dei suggerimenti presentati dal CTIA e dal SIF) più una lettura interpretativa generale.

Il Capitolo si è celebrato dal 25 aprile al 15 maggio 2010 ad Ariccia con la partecipazione di 64 capitolari. Nella relazione sullo stato della Congregazione, il Superiore generale ha presentato in dettaglio il quadro della situazione (statistiche su persone e comunità) e ha dato ragione dell'operato dal Governo su ognuna delle priorità e linee operative circa la spiritualità paolina, la pastorale vocazionale e formazione paolina, la missione paolina nella comunicazione di oggi, il servizio dell'autorità, la situazione economica e finanziaria, la Famiglia Paolina, i rapporti ufficiali con la Chiesa e una panoramica verso il 2014, anno del Centenario. Attorno a questa effemeride i capitolari scelsero l'obiettivo generale: «Nel Centenario del carisma paolino, ci impegniamo a ravvivare con fedeltà creativa il dono ricevuto da Dio per mezzo di san Paolo e del beato Giacomo Alberione, annunciando in comunione fraterna il Vangelo di Cristo Maestro, Via Verità e Vita nella cultura della comunicazione».

In base a tale obiettivo sono state formulate le priorità e linee operative che regoleranno l'azione di governo lungo il sessennio circa l'apostolato, comunità e spiritualità, animazione vocazionale e formazione, e in rapporto alla Famiglia Paolina (in quanto la Società San Paolo è "altrice" dell'insieme delle Congregazioni e Istituti fondati da Don Alberione). Inoltre si è indirizzato un messaggio ai collaboratori ed un altro alla Famiglia Paolina. Si è preso anche visione di alcune mozioni presentate al Capitolo.

In data 8 maggio i capitolari hanno rieletto a Superiore generale don Silvio Sassi per il sessennio 2010-2016.

In applicazione di alcuni dettati capitolari, lungo la seconda metà del 2010 e tutto l'anno 2011, si sono succeduti questi avvenimenti principali:

- Costituzione della Commissione congregazionale per il Centenario (e nomina di alcuni membri anche per la relativa Commissione paolina).
- Approvazione degli Statuti del CTIA, SIF e CSP con le relative nomine.
- Costituzione della Commissione per la revisione della normativa congregazionale.
- Si decide che il bollettino *San Paolo* non si pubblicherà in forma cartacea: passa a *on line*.
- Incontro CTIA-SIF.
- Incontro del Governo generale con i Superiori circoscrizionali.
- Incontri dei diversi gruppi apostolici (GEC, CIDEP, ESW), del CTIA, ecc.
- Sono stati definiti i temi annuali per l'animazione spirituale della Congregazione lungo il sessennio, ispirati all'obiettivo generale del IX Capitolo generale, in attuazione della linea operativa 3.2.1: "Ravvivare con fedeltà creativa" (2011), "Il dono ricevuto per mezzo di san Paolo" (2012), "Il dono ricevuto dal beato Giacomo Alberione" (2013), "Annunciando in comunione fraterna" (2014), Il Vangelo di Gesù Cristo Via Verità e Vita (2015), "Nella cultura della comunicazione" (2016).