



SOCIETÀ SAN PAOLO
il Superiore generale

Fr. Alberione and the Pauline Priesthood

As the centenary of the priestly Ordination of Blessed James Alberione recurs (29 June 1907), we take the occasion to pause on a fundamental aspect of the life and ministerial activity of our beloved Founder.

1. Fr. Alberione, diocesan priest

1.1. By his own testimony, Fr. Alberione considers as the “first clear light” of his priestly vocation the answer that he gives, as first elementary grader, to his teacher who asks the children regarding their future: “I’ll be a priest” (*AD*, n. 9). That affirmation “offered him consequences: in studies, piety, thoughts, behavior. Even his times for recreation were directed in that sense” (*Id*, n. 9).

On 25 October 1896, the young man James entered the minor seminary of the diocese of **Bra**, where he stayed for four years attending gymnasium classes (1896-1900). In April of 1900, those in charge of the seminary advise the young seminarian to return to his family for good, perhaps because of an interior crisis followed up also by a great eagerness for readings of every sort. In October of 1900, at age 16, he enters the seminary of **Alba** to ascertain his vocation to the priesthood.

1.2. After only two months from his entrance in the seminary of Alba, on the night between 31 December 1900 and 1 January 1901, an event takes place determining the rest of the life of the young seminarian. In *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae* (=AD), Fr. Alberione describes the importance for his life of that **night of prayer**: “The night that divided the past century from the current one was decisive for the specific mission and particular spirit in which the Pauline Family would be born and live” (n. 13). As he prays for the needs of the Church and reflects on the analyses of the Christian sociologists and on the power of the press, he comes to the conclusion: “ He felt deeply obliged to prepare himself to do something for the Lord and for the men of the new century, with whom he would have lived” (n.15).

This strong internal experience must, however, take into account his successive ordinary life in the seminary and his **Diary**, written when he was 18, becomes a useful instrument in order to understand the searching of the young seminarian who lives in a constant conflict between complete donation to God and the opposing experiences.

During the years of preparation for the **Sacred Orders**, the cleric Alberione is spiritually directed by the canon Francesco Chiesa. In addition to the intense study of theology, he dedicates himself to the teaching of the Catechism, the spread of the Gospel and to participation in conferences and courses dealing with Christian sociology.

On 24 June 1906, James Alberione is admitted to the Tonsurate and to the four minor Orders: Porter, Lector, Exorcist, Acolyte. Five days later, on 29 June 1906, he

receives the **Subdeaconate**. On 14 October 1906, he is ordained **Deacon** and on 29 June 1907 he receives the **priestly Ordination**.

In the period that followed, Fr. Alberione obtains his **doctorate in Theology** in Genoa (10 April 1908) and for some months does pastoral ministry as **vice curate** in the parish of San Bernardo at Narzole. In October of 1908 the bishop calls him back to the seminary, giving him the tasks of **spiritual director** and **professor**. For the teaching of **liturgy**, Fr. Alberione prepares himself by reading resource books and periodicals of his time (cf *AD*, nn. 71-74). These enable him to assume even the work of master of ceremonies, seminary sacristan, bishop's ceremonialist and compiler of the book of ceremonies. He teaches also **Sacred Art** and in this way he can document himself through books, magazines, visits and conferences related to the theme. He also continues to teach **catechesis** in the Dome (of Alba) and in the parish of Sts. Cosmas and Damian, perfecting this teaching with the study of **pedagogy** applied to catechesis. Particular commitment and study requires from Fr. Alberione the accompanying of the young priests in their **pastoral ministry**: in order to teach well, he reads whatever can be useful to him, drawing in particular from two authors of pastoral theology: Swoboda and Krieg (cf *AD*, n. 84).

Another intense activity that occupies that period is his **social commitment**: he takes part in conferences and congresses, enters in contact with Catholic organizations and resource persons for the social action of believers, contributes to the diocesan weekly *Gazzetta d'Alba*, even going on field trips for several years to favor directly "the elections of candidates supported by Catholics" (*AD*, n. 62).

1.3. His teaching during the year 1911-1912 leads Fr. Alberione to compile **Appunti di teologia pastorale** (Notes on pastoral theology) (=ATP) limited to seminarians. Putting together suggestions obtained from 18 parish priests of the dioceses and what he learned from books, magazines, treatises and tracts about pastoral, Fr. Alberione prepares this text to help the priests to "solve the very difficult problems that the conditions of our times have created for pastors of souls". In 1915 a new corrected edition will be published with the preface of the Cardinal of Turin. The intention of the author is that of "offering to the young priests a guide that, in all simplicity, may give direction to their first steps in public life: but one that is a practical and secure guide".

When he describes the **pastoral action of the diocesan priest**, Fr. Alberione clarifies that: "Christianity is not a complex of ceremonies, external acts, bows, etc: it is a new life"... "It is necessary that a man be a Christian not only because he is baptized, not only in Church, but at home, in his family, in society" (*ATP*, 81-82). For this integral pastoral, a priest who goes out of the sacristy is needed: "How is it possible to do good to someone you do not know? How can one be searched if he is not known?" (*Id*, 84). The parish priest must go to souls: "The parish priest is pastor of all: he must also leave the ninety-nine secured sheep to trace the lost one: much more if the sheep that are safe are few while the lost ones are many" (*Id*, 86).

In order to strengthen the preaching coming from the pulpit, Fr. Alberione proposes to the diocesan priests that they provide good books and magazines and that they come up with a traveling library because "a good book is a trusted friend, and even a preacher that you can hear during needed times" (*Id*, 339).

1.4. In 1915, Fr. Alberione publishes **La donna associata allo zelo sacerdotale** (Woman as helper of priestly zeal) (=DA, 14), edited by the typographical School "Piccolo Operaio". In the introduction, the author explains that he has been inspired

by Mons. Mermillod who said to the women: "You must be apostles" and by Frassinetti who pointed them as called "to an almost priesthood and to a true apostolate". The book is directed to the clergy and to the woman, so that when women help in the pastoral activity of the parish priest, they may become true apostles.

Describing the priest, Fr. Alberione asks: "What is the mission of the priest on earth? To save himself? It's too little. To make himself a saint? Also too little. What therefore? To save himself, *but in saving others...* The priest is *the man for others*" (DA, 14). Moreover: "Whoever reduces his priestly life to the mass and to the breviary, or writes on his flag and takes as his motto only these words: *I-God*, would not be a priest. More suitable for him would be the cloister wherein he could sanctify himself and perhaps through prayer sanctify others, but not the life of a secular priest" (*Id*, 16). Then citing Pius X, Fr. Alberione explains: *For the priest, an individual sanctity is not enough. One must work in the vineyard of the Lord.* Therefore, have this motto: *I-God-Souls-People*" (*Id*, 16-17).

To the social sanctity of the Priest corresponds also the need to be the pastor of all, not only of the few faithful who spontaneously come to church (cf DA, 19-20). And it is precisely to be able to reach all persons and all environments that the priest needs the complementary work of the woman, utilizing the feminine thrust of the time: "The woman of today must form the men of today: she must take care of the needs of the man of today, must make use of the means of today" (*Id*, 38).

One of the works done by women in the parish is the commitment to "diffuse the good press and to do away with the bad one" (*Id*, 193), creating traveling libraries (*Id*, 194) and praying every day to Saint Paul, the patron of the good press (*Id*, 164-165).

1.5. Through his teaching activity and through his first writings, Fr. Alberione promotes a vision and a complete practice of the **Christian life**; the authentic **mission** of the diocesan priest who sanctifies himself in his search and commitment for all souls; a **utilization of the woman** to reach all using all means including the **good press** and **traveling libraries**.

As we can see, the great pastoral sensibility of Fr. Alberione finds its first sphere of application in the ministry of the diocesan priest to which he stamps a new way of exercise. However, while he carries out this precious work of pastoral reform, Fr. Alberione keeps alive his experience of the "night of light" and cultivates in himself the need to reach the faraway by a form that can come to any place, **the press**.

On 8 September 1913, the Bishop of Alba gives his consent so that Fr. Alberione may assume the direction of the diocesan weekly *Gazzetta d'Alba*: "When it was a matter of starting, the Bishop sounded the hour of God, sounded the bell, charging him to dedicate himself to the diocesan press that opened the way to the apostolate" (AD, n. 30). In that way, Fr. Alberione's pastoral sensibility expands in utilizing the power of the press for the Gospel.

Very soon the Bishop frees Fr. Alberione from all his commitments in the diocese: "We allow you to be free, we shall provide differently; give all of yourself to the work that was started" (AD, n. 30). On 20 August 1914 Fr. Alberione officially starts **The typographical school "Piccolo Operaio"**, the embryo from which the **Society of St. Paul** will be born.

2. Fr. Alberione, Pauline priest

2.1. In *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae* Fr. Alberione clarifies that “at first he thought of a Catholic organization of writers, technicians, booksellers, Catholic retailers: and provide direction, work, apostolic spirit... But soon, in a greater light towards 1910, he made a definitive step: writers, technicians, propagandists, but *religious persons*” (nn. 23-24). As we can see, while he carries out his ministry in the seminary, Fr. Alberione continues his reflection on the project he carries in his heart.

In the **Diary** of Blessed Timothy Giaccardo we can find a trace of the gradual maturation of the ideas of Fr. Alberione regarding the Press Apostolate. On 4 March 1917, he notes: “The persuasion of the necessity of the apostolate of the Press, of a Congregation to be founded to realize it and of the superiority of the Press apostolate over the ordinary mission for the present-day needs of the Church is very strong in me; still to be fulfilled, it goes on to penetrate all my life” (*Diary*, p. 60).

Other important texts in order to understand the formation of the apostolic thought of Fr. Alberione are contained in the work under the care of Fr. Rosario Esposito, *La primavera paolina* (=PP). This collects the bulletins of the *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa* from 1918 to 1927.

Upon observing the phenomenon of the rapid growth of the press like many of his time, Fr. Alberione thinks of “**opposing press to press**”: adopt the press to combat the press that disseminates in consciences and in society convictions that drive away the people from the Church. However, he wants to make use of the press in a new way, as he explains: “Between the Good Press and the Apostolate of the Press there is still an abyss. The Apostolate of the Press is another thing, immensely superior. Such an apostolate is the diffusion of thought, of morals, of Christian civilization, in a word, of the Gospel, by means of the Press, exactly as it would be done through the word” (PP, p. 668). To accomplish the good press, “men who know are enough; but to work in the Apostolate **a priestly heart and soul is necessary**. When St. Augustine heard loudly for three times the invitation: “Take and read”, what did he do? He opened the letters of St. Paul and from there he drank the supernatural life. Mankind will forever bless this apostolate” (*Id*, p. 668ff).

2.2. In the period in which Fr. Alberione was working out his project, two statements often mentioned in *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa* were widespread in Catholic circles. The first, attributed to the bishop of Magonza, Mons. Wilhelm Emanuel Ketteler (1811-1877): “**If Saint Paul returned today, he would work as a journalist**”. The second is of Tertullian (III Century): “**A time will come when the ink of Catholic writers will be the seed of Christians like the blood of martyrs today**”. Also, to Pius X was attributed the phrase: “One newspaper added, one church subtracted!”, while Card. Mercier wrote: “I would delay the construction of a church to contribute to the founding of a newspaper”.

This atmosphere of mobilization for the press leads Fr. Alberione to conclude: “Today, what gives the main testimony to Jesus Christ is the Good Press” (PP, p. 411). “The world needs “**a new and profound evangelization...** There is urgent need for **new** missionaries, and numerous ones, for young people full of determination and enthusiasm so that our press, the Christian press, may come into all families. Missionaries are needed! **New** missionaries for this **new** and fertile apostolate!” (*Id*, pp. 680.682).

2.3. Since the use of the press corresponds to a “new evangelization”, it is necessary to invent an appropriate predication that goes side by side with that of the parish: **written preaching side by side with oral preaching** (cf PP, p. 172). It is a new form of

integral evangelization that is complementary to parish pastoral. In fact: "It is useless to think otherwise: from the church, the priest can form somewhat the thinking of his people; but today the church is not enough because outside of her the press preaches every day, with insistence and with effect" (*Id*, p. 733).

It is the nature of the press apostolate that requires the Pauline priest: "The press apostolate is in its substance, origin, object, aim, the same thing as the apostolate of the word. It is distinguished only by the manner through which it is exercised... Now it is clear that since the priest is the ordinary and main minister of the apostolate-word, necessarily he is also of the Apostolate-Press" (*Apostolato Stampa*, pp. 24-25). Pastoral commitment in the press apostolate requires the Pauline priesthood and at the same time the Pauline priesthood guarantees that the press apostolate is not a simple "assistant" of parish preaching, but a **true evangelization** realized in a different form. **This is the originality of the Pauline charism in the Church.**

The Pauline priesthood places all the stages of the realization of the press apostolate on the level of a true **sacramental**, to be understood in theological certainty that God makes use of **material elements** to produce **supernatural effects** with efficacy. "Water for baptism must be natural water and, as much as possible, pure and readied with a special blessing: and it serves as matter for producing supernatural effects, cancellation of the stain of origin and infusion of the new life by which we become children of God. In the apostolate the matter (industry and commerce) is used for supernatural effects "in the spread of Catholic doctrine, through the use of the most fruitful and fastest means" (*San Paolo*, February 1952).

This supernatural vision discards every debasement: "There was no need for a religious institute in order to be engaged in industry! Persons consecrated to God are not necessary for commercial activity!" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo*, 1946-1949, p. 574). The Congregation must never lower itself to the level of an industry, of commerce, but always remain at the human-divine height of the apostolate exercised using the fastest and most fruitful means, in a pastoral spirit... Not business, but evangelization" (*San Paolo*, February 1951).

2.4. If printed preaching is an act of true evangelization entrusted to the sacramental function of Pauline priesthood, it is easy to establish other equivalences besides the correspondence between "written preaching" and "oral Preaching". In *Apostolato Stampa* Fr. Alberione compares the parish bulletin to a "paper pulpit" (p. 72) and to a "bell made of paper" (p. 73).

He is even more explicit in his successive writings: "Our technical instruments, our machines, the monotypes, the whole radio equipment, etc., are sacred objects because of the aim that they serve. Hence the machine becomes a **pulpit**; the locales of the composing department, of the machines and of the propaganda become **churches** wherein one must exhibit greater respect than when inside a school. If the school is a **temple**, how much more the premises of our apostolate!" (*Per un rinnovamento spirituale*, p. 548). "When these instruments of progress serve evangelization, they receive a consecration, are elevated to the greatest dignity. The office of the writer, the locale of the technology and the bookstore become **churches** and **pulpits**" (*Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, I, 316).

Evangelization using the press is entrusted to the Pauline priest who realizes it using **editorial activity, technology and diffusion** as his pulpit and church. In his commitment of complete communication of Christ, the work of the Pauline priest constitutes a true ministry. **The Pauline priest is not involved in the pastoral activity**

of the parish because he already has his own parish: the multitude of his readers scattered everywhere.

2.5. As the parish of a diocese is not made up by just one priest, so the **Pauline parish** has been enriched by the Founder. The Pauline priesthood is not to be understood in the **clerical sense** or privileged dignity, but as a **guarantee** that with the press apostolate and eventually with the apostolate of the “fastest and most efficacious” communications of every time, it’s possible to **give God to souls and souls to God**” (*Id*, I, 313). For this pastoral reason and using the theological categories of his time, Fr. Alberione sets the reason for the extension of the Pauline priesthood to the foundations to which along the way he gives life.

The institution of the **Disciples of the Divine Master** (1924) is presented as participation in the Pauline priesthood in *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae*: “Moreover, why cannot they yet be associated to an apostolate? As one time Institutes arose in which the religious Priest found the way to works of zeal and care of souls open, today it’s necessary to give to the lay Brother a participation in the zeal of the Priest, to give him **almost a priesthood!**” (n. 40).

Since the accomplishment of the press apostolate shows to be complex, the Founder imagines the Society of St. Paul as composed a third by **Priest-writers** and two-thirds by Disciples for **technical production and diffusion**. The single Pauline vocation fulfills its “**teaching**” function through the complementary diversity of tasks that the apostolate of the press and eventually of the editions and of communications require.

Putting to good use in his founding activities the convictions he already expressed in his book *La donna associata allo zelo sacerdotale*, where he considers the woman and the sister as “**almost priests**”, Fr. Alberione gives life to the **Daughters of St. Paul**, to the **Pious Disciples of the Divine Master**, to the **Sisters of Jesus the Good Shepherd** and to the **Sisters of Mary Queen of Apostles**.

As confirmation of his “Pauline priesthood” vision of the other foundations, Fr. Alberione turns to the Daughters of St. Paul exclaiming: “Your mission is connected to the work of the Priest... What are you? I would say **deaconesses, priestesses!** In the way that we talk of Mary” (*Vademecum*, n. 92). From the start, by means of a *Statute* written in 1918, Fr. Alberione involves in his project of missionaries of the press apostolate the **Pauline cooperators**. When in the sixties, secular Institutes gain prominence, the Founder delineates the **Institutes Aggregated** to the Society of St. Paul.

In the course of the Spiritual Exercises of 1960, Fr. Alberione describes the “**Pauline parish**” (cf *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, I, 371-383) as composed of Priests and Disciples, Sisters, consecrated laity, diocesan priests gathered in an aggregated Institute, Pauline Cooperators. In that parish the Society of St. Paul functions as an “**animator**” because “the immense Pauline parish is limited only by the boundaries of the world and as flock it has both those already in the sheepfold and those it wants to welcome inside” (*Id*, I, 382).

2.6. It is the constant concern of the Founder that the Society of St. Paul be not simply a **publishing house**, but a form of “**new evangelization**”: “Let the Congregation study this idea and make its edition from it: we are neither business people or industrialists, but a Society of Apostles” (*Mihi vivere Christus est*, n. 185).

The communication of the person and of the teaching of Christ must therefore be **complete**: “We have to correct our tendency to divide Christ, to break up what he has

united. For some time we have noticed this in some preachers and writers. Man is just one although he has three distinct faculties... We have, in fact, to bring Christ to man and give the whole man to God through Jesus Christ. If we separate Dogma, Morals and Cult, we shall make of man a mutilated being that would not reach salvation, since he is not inserted in the total Christ" (*San Paolo*, November-December 1954).

The **content** of evangelization is the same as that of oral predication that takes place in the parish: dogma, morals and cult presented to the globality of the person insofar as he is mind, will and heart. Hence, the **totality of Christ** for the **integrality** of the person.

Fr. Alberione encloses the contents of evangelization through the press in the unity of dogma, morals and cult: "A Christ divided into sections does not restore us. The complete Christ is resurrection, life and salvation for the whole world. Let us make our apostolate complete and sanctifying" (*Vademecum*, n. 1023) and single out the total Christ in the Christological definition of **Jesus Master Way, Truth and Life**.

2.7. Since the Paulines are "**apostles**" and not "**mercenaries**" of evangelization, it is necessary to **create unity** between the experience of one's faith and the mission of evangelizing: it is necessary to give to others what one has experienced in oneself. For this reason, Fr. Alberione formulates the **Pauline spirituality**: Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life; Mary, Queen of the Apostles; Saint Paul the Apostle.

The Pauline spirituality has been conceived by the Founder in close reference to Pauline evangelization: **every charism in the Church is an unbreakable unity of spirituality and mission**. Using a paradox, we could say that not every spirituality is adequate for a specific charism. This observation explains why during the 20's Fr. Alberione talks of the necessity of "**new devotions for new apostolates**" and substitutes the presentation of Christ adored as Sacred Heart, and of Mary venerated as the Immaculate, with Christ the Divine Master and with Mary Queen of the Apostles. In this way Pauline evangelization experiences first in itself the totality of faith to be able thereafter to convey it to the press apostolate. Preaching using the press is not something added to the commitment of sanctification of the Pauline evangelizer. It is an immediate consequence: one cannot live the spirituality of a partial Christ and then consider himself capable of commitment in an evangelization using the press that offers the total Christ. Every dichotomy can create an identity crisis.

In the Constitution of the Congregation dedicated to evangelization through the press, reference to **Saint Paul** is present from the start. Fr. Alberione is fascinated by three expressions of Saint Paul: "It is not anymore I that lives, but the Christ in me" (Gal 2,20); "I have made myself all for all" (1Cor 9,22); "I strain forward" (Phil 3,13). The Congregation wants to be Saint Paul living today.

3. The Pauline priesthood today

3.1 For Fr. Alberione the evolution from secular priesthood to Pauline religious priesthood has entailed an enormous travail, comforted however by the clear conviction that he has received from God a **mission** to accomplish in the Church. To obtain the **diocesan approval** and, above all, the **pontifical** one for the Society of St. Paul with its specific charism was a commitment that absorbed much energy from the Founder.

During the first years of foundation, Fr. Alberione works in close connection with the parishes of the Piedmontese diocese and successively with those of Italy through

the creation of the magazine *Vita Pastorale* (1916), the printing of numerous parish bulletins, the setting up of parish libraries and the creation of the international magazine *Pastor Bonus* (1937).

Looking attentively at the letters that in the form of reports Fr. Alberione sends in succession to the Bishop of Alba and, in view of approval, to the Holy See, we perceive his constant nagging thought to obtain that approval as a **Congregation** (cf Giancarlo Rocca, *La formazione della Societa' San Paolo, 1914-1927*, Roma 1982).

The joy of Fr. Alberione is therefore understandable when during the Spiritual Exercises of 1960, he narrates: "For the Pious Society of St. Paul, after considering the particular and unusual novelty of the Institute, of its nature and of its apostolate, the Congregation of the Religious decided to present everything to the Pope, leaving to him all responsibility on a matter of so singular a novelty, importance and consequence... And the great Pope Pius XI, open to all the needs of the time, approved; and we received the diocesan approval. In like manner advanced the procedures for the Pope's approval. Again, it was the Pope who wanted the Institute. *Thus the Congregation arose directly from the Pope*" (*Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, I, 18).

To the difficulties encountered in the Holy See in order to obtain papal approval for such an Institute revealed as a "**particular and unusual novelty**", should be added difficulties encountered during the first expansion in Rome and later on in the foreign foundations.

In regard to Rome, after opportune verification, the Vicariate puts to Fr. Alberione the condition of assuming a parish and the respective care of souls, and so as to establish himself in the eternal city, he shoulders the commitment to build the church of **Jesus the Good Shepherd** and to assign to it a Pauline priest as pastor (7 February 1937). Thus also, always for the purpose of facilitating papal approval, he accepts temporarily other two parishes in the diocese of Albano Laziale that eventually will be left.

In the same way in other nations, in the period of the beginnings, Fr. Alberione agrees to the request of the Bishops, accepting a parish as a **temporary commitment** but in fact aiming at the Pauline apostolate.

Actually the Society of St. Paul takes care of **6 parishes**: Jesus the Good Shepherd and Queen of the Apostles (erected 26 November 1976) in Rome; St. Luke – Divine Mercy in Chennai and St. Therese in Eluru (India); Our Lady of Sorrows in Pasay City (Philippines) and Santo Inacio de Loyola in Sao Paulo (Brazil). At Aachen (Germany) a Pauline priest is involved in parish activity at the Italian Catholic Mission; in Portugal, two Pauline priests are temporarily committed, part-time, in a parish of the diocese of Braga in view of a Pauline development.

The present orientation of the Congregation is the same as that of the Founder: **if the parish is a commitment limited to the time needed for the development of the Pauline apostolate, it is possible**. I have in mind, for example, the hypothesis of a Pauline presence in Cuba or China, where it would be impossible to start an editorial apostolate.

For all Paulines what the **Constitutions** establish is normative: "Only by way of exception and for serious reasons the Congregation assumes the care of souls in the parishes. For such assumption is competent the Major Superior, with the consent of his Councilors and the approval of the Superior General with the consent of his Council" (art. 76).

The **Directory** on its part, making its own what is provided in church documents, specifies that Paulines who are in charge of parishes “should promote the Pauline charism among the faithful, making them sensitive to social communications by means of opportune initiatives” (art. 76.1).

3.2. The identity of the Pauline priesthood, closely connected to the pastoral character of the Pauline charism dedicated to evangelization through and in communication, has been confirmed and integrated by the reflection of the **Special General Chapter (1969-1971)**: nn. 33, 89-101, 132-182.

In the aftermath of Vatican Council II and as we move away from the departure of our Founder, the Pauline priesthood, as far as Pauline charism is concerned, has been in part and only for a certain period of time, involved in a dangerous dichotomy: **the fracture between Pauline spirituality and Pauline apostolate**.

Due to a series of motives, some Paulines have strongly underlined **spirituality**, risking to enclose it in itself and making it appear almost as an indefinite time of suspension from apostolic commitment. Besides the attitude of the “few remaining enlightened ones” who pronounce judgment on others, the unacceptableness of this spiritualism consists in the absence of the apostolate. The Founder has never taught us **a spirituality separated from the apostolate, but a spirituality for the apostolate**. Our commitment to sanctification is closely tied to our commitment to the apostolate; love for God and love of neighbor become one, so to say, in the apostolate of communications.

In the erroneous vision mentioned above, emphasized is the mission of personal sanctification, interpersonal and group ministry of the Pauline priesthood, whether within or outside of the Pauline Family, while the editorial apostolate is declassified as optional “work” motivated by right intention only, or as a secondary occupation to which to dedicate one’s free time.

On the opposite side, some Paulines have accentuated apostolic commitment, overwhelmed by **total immersion in work** that evangelization through communication demands. The result is evident: putting at risk a very essential spiritual life, not to say one that is sometimes totally absent: absent the mass and the eucharistic visit, systematically absent the retreats, the spiritual exercises and the courses for updating because of a consuming activism that does not allow time.

In this second deviation, the Pauline priesthood is so debased into a professional activity as if only competence in communication makes for the Pauline apostle. In truth, there is risk of becoming mercenaries of the sacred, never personally involved in what by means of the apostolate we say to others. Even when there are apostolic successes, this mentality does not allow the thought that much more could be done and in a better way if the process of Christification necessary for the Pauline apostolate were taken seriously.

Both the **spiritualist emphasis** and the **exaggeration of professionalism in work** are in evident contrast to the teaching of the Founder who has always recommended a fruitful **balance** between sanctity and apostolate. It should be said, further, that in the two attitudes hinted above, the manipulation of the Pauline priesthood causes an imbalance even in the Pauline vocation of the Disciple, the Sister, the consecrated layperson and the Cooperator of the Pauline Family. In effect, in these two extremes the Pauline priesthood runs the risk either of clerical accentuation or insignificant trivialization, instead of being the minimum common denominator of everything.

A consequence not less serious of this disparity is the **fracture** that, in fact, appears between spirituality and apostolate, boosting a prayer not full of apostolate and an apostolate without prayer: a true inconsistency for the Pauline charism where the quality of the apostolate arises from the quality of spiritual experience.

3.3. The gradual entrusting of the young Pauline generations to the schools of philosophy, theology and specialization outside the Congregation, besides the advantages of a serious cultural preparation, has made manifest a **significant deficiency** because of its effect on the Pauline priesthood.

Even the Holy See, in front of the phenomenon of grouping the young in intercongregational or interdiocesan centers of teaching, has made its authoritative voice heard, recommending that single Institutes tailor general studies to their specific charism (cf Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *La collaborazione Inter-Istituti per la formazione*, 8.12.1998). The reason is to avoid a **generic** formation that flattens and neglects what is specific to every Institute judging it to be almost superfluous.

Concerning this matter, for us Paulines vigilance must be twofold. *First of all*, we must complete basic studies, whether for priestly formation or for that of the disciples, with a serious and methodical **formation** in communication (cf *Formazione paolina per la missione*, Direttiva n. 5: *Documento*, p. 35; *Atti*, p. 189). In fact, a superficial formation in communication leads as a fact to a **crisis of identity** because it gives no reason for the bond between spirituality and apostolate. Thus we have the resulting schizophrenia where the personality is different on the spiritual level and on the apostolic level, ending in apostolic dissonance.

Secondly, understanding the **Pauline priesthood** becomes difficult if we compare it with the consolations of the diocesan priesthood. We can therefore understand comments like: "I want to be a priest, not an editor boxed in an office". The **Pauline priesthood involves being a man of communication, whether by media, multimedia or web**: this is the true novelty of the Society of St. Paul in the history of the religious life. If this conviction does not exist, it is better to encourage embracing the diocesan priesthood rather than accepting persons who for personal reasons arising from maladjustment, cast in doubt a clear and constant teaching of the Founder who has lived by the principle of almost totality.

In this regard, it is extravagant enough to invoke the need to "update" or "inculturate" the charism, saying that if Fr. Alberione lived today, he would take on parishes, inserting among the various parish activities also a small bookstore. **To update is not to betray**, and the knowledge of history is important to know from where one is coming from. Fr. Alberione from being a diocesan Priest, became a Pauline Priest. It would be to ignore and contradict all his work by making the return journey, that is, from Pauline priesthood to diocesan priesthood.

3.4. The development of our apostolic works has, in fact, made impractical today the **idea** of our Founder who wanted that all the phases of our apostolate be entrusted to the Paulines, priests and disciples. When he was still living, in front of the important proportions of some apostolic activities, he accepted a gradual integration of lay collaborators. The quantity and a certain mode of participation of lay collaborators in the apostolate poses to the **Pauline priesthood** some questions.

In order to advance the apostolate in an effective way, the Congregation at world level **ever more** is assuming outside personnel. This phenomenon which is unavoidable poses **two problems** factually.

The first is about the insertion of lay people in the place of Paulines who, due to age, labor laws or professional competence, are forced to retire. In some Circumscriptions, this fact generally solves the problem of the efficiency of the apostolate, but it creates the problem of the Paulines who would or could still be committed in the apostolate.

Individual Paulines and entire communities that cannot exercise the Pauline priesthood in the apostolate suffer factually and at times overcome the crisis of identity by making themselves available in greater measure to the diocesan priestly ministry.

The true problem is not the evaluation of the generosity of our confreres who find an alternative apostolic work because rendered not capable for Pauline apostolate. At a deeper level, this situation can give rise to a **sense of fracture** between the so-called “peripheral” communities that must invent for themselves a ministry, and the Paulines who polarize the entire specific apostolate.

Another outstanding inconvenience is the effect that these communities can have over the young who intend to execute an experience of Pauline life: **if there is no exercise in the apostolate, it is quite difficult to talk of a complete “come and see”**.

Besides the abundance of lay people necessary for our apostolate, *the second problem* has to do with a **certain manner of integration** that asks questions of the Pauline priesthood. Fr. Alberione’s great sensibility in organizational matters has led us to assume the form of industrial production with its respective laws and divisions of work.

Some bitter experiences at world level have convinced us that it is not enough to lower ourselves to the role of entrepreneurs in communication in order to obtain adequate results, even if we have won unquestionable advantages of efficacy and transparency.

The rapport between Paulines and lay collaborators must be reflected upon again and given new motive thanks to the wealth of reflections on the **Catholic laity** coming from Vatican Council II and from the post-conciliar period. What is said of the rapport between the **ordained priesthood** and the **common priesthood of the faithful** is more expressive than what the Founder, with great pastoral intuition, has termed “**Pauline priesthood**” and “**almost priesthood**”.

However, we cannot steer away from the original intention of the Founder: the Pauline apostolate is a **pastoral activity** that speaks explicitly about the whole Christ to the whole man and talks about the whole human reality from the Christian point of view. Neither the company structure nor the big responsibilities given to the laypeople can eclipse this **priestly dimension** of the apostolate. The laws of the market and the professional competence of our collaborators must be transformed by the lucidity of the Paulines into **pastoral sensitivities and methods** so that they may “make themselves all for all”. For this reason, it is the competence of Paulines, in an inalienable way, to say the last word on the choice of contents and on the strategies of diffusion. To abdicate means to concur with a true crisis of identity of our charism.

3.5. On 26 November 1950, at the General Congress of the States of Perfection, Fr. Alberione repeats: “The priest preaches to a small scanty flock, in almost empty churches in many regions... They leave the temples to us, when they leave them to us! and they take hold of the souls” and, making his own an authoritative thought, forcefully points out: “we see as urgent a **radical revolution of mentality and method**” in the world of pastoral (*San Paolo*, November 1950).

We extract the same pastoral necessity from what John Paul II writes in his encyclical *Redemptoris mission* (07.12.1990): “My predecessor Paul VI said that ‘the break between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time’, and the field of modern communications confirms fully this judgment” (n.37c). From the conciliar decree *Inter mirifica* to the apostolic letter *Il rapido sviluppo* (24.01.2005) the many issuances of the Church about communication for evangelization is an **irrefutable stimulus** for the actuality and development of the Pauline charism, understood as a true priesthood capable of “giving God to men and men to God”.

Starting from the complex and ever developing phenomenon of modern communication and assimilating the precious indications of the Magisterium regarding communication, we Paulines must **deepen and relaunch** the Pauline charism. Our Founder has had the great merit of being among those who have made the Church aware of evangelization through the press and other means. Now it is the Church that encourages the Pauline charism to stay at the frontier and be the pioneer in the ecclesial community.

It is a **misleading equivocation** to pretend relaunching the Pauline charism by minimizing or abandoning the apostolate of communications in order to replace it with other initiatives like the desire to substitute editorial work and diffusion by assuming parish ministry. That is a radical change that we must be on guard against with care and determination. **The Pauline apostolate is only one: evangelization in the culture of communication.** Vocation to diocesan priesthood is a gift of God, but a gift of God of equal dignity also is the Pauline priesthood. It is well to choose between the two, without fomenting doubts and crises that concern personal, not Congregational problems.

For us Paulines who fully and with thrust live the pastoral character of the Pauline charism, the invitation of our Father Saint Paul to “strain forward” (Phil 3,13) holds value.

In the established seats and through adequate instruments we must have the courage to think about the Pauline priesthood even in view of evangelizing the **culture of communication**, taking up web and multimedia communication. As Saint Paul was invited to preach Christ to the pagans, the Paulines of today are sent to preach the same Christ to the complex of communication. As Saint Paul in his vision allows himself to be solicited to predication by a Macedonian (Acts 16,9), so the Paulines allow themselves to be solicited to the boldness of evangelization by modern communication.

Let us ask Blessed James Alberione for the whole Congregation and for the whole Pauline family to be able to keep and relaunch his pastoral intuition: the entirety of the Pauline charism is imbued with the **Pauline priesthood** because every form of communication can lead to faith, prayer and witness.

Rome, 26 May 2007
Feast of Mary, Queen of the Apostle



Don Silvio Sassi
Fr. Silvio Sassi
Superior General