



The work of Holy perpetual Masses

Historical evolution. At present every Pauline Priest is to celebrate 6 Holy Masses every year to remain faithful to the commitment of Blessed James Alberione, “*ad perpetuam rei memoriam*”, of 2400 Holy Masses for the cooperators and benefactors, as “precious and voluntary gift offered for their cooperation, offerings and works; and it is for all the years, till the Lord wants the Congregation to exist” (*San Paolo*, 1 April 1936).

The Primo Maestro specifies that from the beginning of the Society of St Paul and of the Daughters of St Paul, the Lord raised cooperators and benefactors who have contributed to the development of the foundations “with prayer, offering and works”. “Generosity and charity demand recognition and reciprocation of gifts. And thus, as an expression of gratitude and recognition of charity, began to celebrate for them, according to the possibility, a certain number of Masses every year” (*San Paolo*, 1 April 1936).

In the succeeding issues of the *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa* (1918-1927) and of the periodical *San Paolo* (from 1926 onwards), a progressive increase of the number of Holy Masses is documented which was made possible by the ordination of new Pauline Priests: 2 Holy Masses in 1920 for an offering of L.10 which, thanks to a particular legacy, became 3 in the same year from the month of July; 4 in 1921, 7 and then 300 in 1922, always for the same offering of L. 10.

22 April 1922, the work of the Holy Masses willed by Fr. Alberione is approved by the Vicar General of the diocese of Alba.

From December 1922, Fr. Alberione, maintaining the offering of L. 10, commits himself to celebrate 1000 Holy Masses; although there are some indications towards the end of 1923, with certainty, from 1 January 1925 the Holy Masses are 2000 and in 1947, it had reached 2400. Towards the end of 1953 Fr. Alberione reconfirms: “The Society of St Paul celebrate every year, as a sign of gratitude 2400 Masses for all the Cooperators” (*Abundantes divitiæ gratiæ suæ*, n. 122). The last time that the Primo Maestro makes reference, with a direct intervention to the commitment to celebrate 2400 Holy Masses is in 1965; from then onwards, the number remained unchanged, and it is respected with generosity by the Pauline Priests and precisely registered every year by the Secretary General.

Pauline Spirit in the commitment to 2400 Holy Masses. This intention is always kept in mind in our prayers: that all those who help the Pauline Family with prayers, works, offerings, with sending vocations, etc. and that after death, immediately or at the earliest, could contemplate and possess God, love him and rejoice with him forever (AD, n. 123). The beginning, the initial developments and the strengthening of the foundations of the blessed James Alberione till today are indebted to the spiritual and material helps received from the cooperators and benefactors and, as a sign of gratitude for this “pauline collaboration”, the Society of St Paul offer the action of grace of 2400 Holy Masses.

As rightly reminded by Fr. Domenico Benito in the *pauline "treasure of grace"*, the pauline meaning of the celebration of 2400 Holy Masses must be understood as "an exchange of gifts" among the collaborators and benefactors, and the other Institutions of the Pauline Family which allows us to unite forces in order to carry out the will of God through Pauline Charism. "The Society of St Paul lives and flourishes because the Friends and Cooperators help it with their offerings. On the other hand, the members of the Society commit themselves to prayer to attain the heavenly benedictions on the Cooperators and their needs. Are we not then justified in writing that we together with our Friends and Cooperators form a single great family?" (UCBS 20 May 1925).

From the very beginning, the work of the 2400 Holy Masses is closely connected with the press apostolate, but it is **not an exclusive** spiritual benefit of Pauline Cooperators since, by giving the prescribed offering at least once, **whoever, living or dead**, can get themselves registered, and forever.

The Cooperators, with their offering to get themselves registered as Pauline Cooperators, are at the same time registered to the 2400 Holy Masses, whereas who wishes only to be registered to the perpetual Masses as a means of collaboration in the pauline charism will invest the prescribed offering: "All the spiritual benefactors and all those collaborators and benefactors registered in the Union of Cooperators through their offering of at least L.10 are admitted to participate in the application of such Holy Masses". In *San Paolo* of January 1956, it is established: "the offering to become part of the Union of Cooperators by participating in the annual 2400 Masses is raised to 1000 Lire. In the foreign nations, the offering is raised proportionately".

With the passage of time, Fr. Alberione continues to pay particular interest to the **identity** of Pauline Cooperator; in 1951, after emphasizing the two goals of the Society of St Paul, "the sanctification of the members and the spreading of the catholic doctrine through the publishing apostolate" he indicates clearly: "The Pauline Cooperator is one who knows well these two goals and wants to collaborate because they could be achieved: a) by attending to a greater sanctification according to one's state of life, b) by helping with work, prayer and offering, the diffusion of catholic doctrine. ... The Cooperators should know that the Society of St Paul accompanies them in life and in death with prayers and application of 2400 Masses every year" (*San Paolo*, April 1951).

In order that the vocation to Pauline Cooperator be understood and lived well, Fr. Alberione recommends: "The registration to become Cooperators should be preceded and specially carried out with adequate instruction. Certainly it is a good thing that the faithful want to participate in the 2400 Holy Masses, but this is only one step. It is necessary that they are enlightened and participate, according to their possibility, to the pauline life and works; they should understand better what does it mean true cooperation and fulfill it generously" (*San Paolo*, April 1951).

In 1961, reaching the end of the foundational epoch, the Primo Maestro clearly states: "At times there is a confusion between the meaning of a true cooperator with the offering to become part of the Work of the Masses. All the Cooperators, even if they don't give the offering of thousand lire, without any difference whether they are registered or not, become part of the Work of the Masses; Perhaps they may give their suffering, perhaps they may send a vocation, etc. Certainly, all those who have given the offering to become part of the Masses, they are to be registered, but for the others, it depends upon the one who is at the head and directs

the Work of 2400 Masses, and the intention is this: true cooperation in the right sense" (*To the Daughters of St Paul. Explanation of the Constitutions*, 1961, n. 401).

The registration to the 2400 Holy Masses is a form of "cooperation" to the Pauline Charism which can be realized by anybody, but the one who wishes to live the vocation and mission of Pauline Cooperator in its fullness as member of the **Association of Pauline Cooperators**, will find in the *Statute* the formulation of its identity as it is willed by the Primo Maestro from 1918 onwards.

Concrete dispositions for the 2400 Holy Masses. In *San Paolo* of August-September 1947, Fr. Alberione enlists and explains 12 norms regarding the registration to the Union of Cooperators and to the Work of Holy Masses. Here are a few of them of particular importance:

"1. It is up to the Superior General of the Society of St Paul to determine the conditions and to accept the Cooperators; and only one who is accepted by him is registered to the Union of Cooperators and then, he can gain the indulgence given by the Holy See and participate in the fruit of the 2400 Masses which the priests of the Society of St Paul apply every year for the Cooperators".

"4. For the registration, it is necessary and indispensable that all the names of the registered persons are sent to Rome, to the Superior General".

"5. The houses of the Daughters of St Paul, of the Pious Disciples and of the Good Shepherd Sisters, with the names of those registered, will pass on to Rome the 50% of the offering received at the time of registration".

"7. The participation in the fruit of the Holy Masses, in the Indulgence and in the spiritual merits, will start only on the day in which the list of the names with the 50% offering arrive Rome. Taking into consideration the validity of registration, one must use greater diligence".

"9. In Italy, at present, the offering for registration is 100 L. for every person. For the foreign nations, it is necessary to notify the quota of registration to Rome for its approval".

"12. The registration form is launched by each house, and they will be sent to Rome every month with the names and the percentage of the offering".

In *San Paolo* of April 1951, besides reproducing the test of 1917, the Primo Maestro adds other indications: it is necessary "to have and to give the just concept of Pauline Cooperator"; to prepare a "paper of explanations" on the identity of Cooperator; "from 1 June 1951, in Italy, the minimum offering for the registration to the Union of Cooperators is L. 200. For abroad, it is necessary to notify it to Rome for its approval".

In 1956, after a visit to the community of the Society of St Paul in Cile which presented 15 questions on Pauline Cooperators, the Primo Maestro, after having returned to Rome, responds to all in writing. The question n. 7 asks: "the militants of the Movement participate in the treasure of grace of the Congregation even if they are not registered in the Work of 2400 Masses?". The response of the Primo Maestro: "if they make the usual offering. Then we will see what is necessary" (cfr. *Carissimi in San Paolo*, pp. 385-388). In *San Paolo* of September-October-November 1968, it reads: "on 2 October, the Primo Maestro has established that every house send to the Director of Cooperators (the list of names), the percentage of registration to the 2400 Masses, keeping for themselves the 50% percentage. No house is except from this payment".

Taking into consideration what is established by the Founder, at present, the dispositions for the Work of the 2400 Holy Masses are:

1. The registration to the Work of 2400 Holy Masses must be individual and perpetual, and it is meant for the living and the dead.

2. The offering, which is to be given once, for the registration, must be calculated as double of the offering of a Holy Mass in the territory of the local Church of the one who offers.

3. The 50% of the offering is retained by the one who has accepted the registration and the 50% must be sent to the Secretary General of the Society of St Paul, via Alessandro Severo, 58 - 00145 ROMA.

4. The list of those who are registered, with the corresponding offering, must be sent to the Secretary General of the Society of St Paul, at the address *messeperpetue@paulus.net*, within and not beyond three months after the registration.

5. The participation in the fruit of the Holy Masses, to the Indulgences and to the spiritual merits, will begin only on the day in which the names of those who are registered are added in the register of the Secretary General of the Society of St Paul.

6. All those who belong to the Pauline Family who commit themselves to respect scrupulously the proceeding indicated can collect the registration.

7. One who collects it, should hand over a "receipt" with which he/she declares the registration. The general secretariat of the Society of St Paul, makes available a "form" which can be a model, and can be adapted to a "receipt" at the local level.

8. When it is foreseen that the Cooperators, becoming members of the Association of Pauline Cooperators with *Promise*, give also the offering established for the registration to 2400 Holy Masses, their names are to be indicated to the general secretariat of the Society of St Paul to be registered in the official register.

9. All the Benefactors participate in the spiritual benefit of the 2400 Holy Masses; if they wish to get their names registered in the official register, the proceedings indicated are to be followed.

10. The Work of the 2400 Holy Masses, in the initial intention of the Primo Maestro, is closely associated with the apostolate of the press and to all the apostolates of the Pauline Family. For long time, the offering for the registration to the Association of Pauline Cooperators willed by the Founder was identified with the offering for the registration to the Work of Holy Masses, so that it is lived as "act of cooperation in the Pauline charism". With the passage of time and with the increase of registration to the 2400 Holy Masses, Fr. Alberione has clarified the specific identity of Pauline Cooperator. Today, it is good that the occasion of registration to 2400 Holy Masses be used as an opportunity to illustrate the Pauline charism and the Institutions of the Pauline Family.

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