

A MEMORIAL OF PAUL

INTRODUCTION

Esteemed Pauline confrere,

We share the joy of having in common the same Father, the Apostle Paul, and the task of being his perpetuators, at the start of this new century, after having received the great gift of the Beatification of our Founder. Don Giacomo Alberione affirmed that we need saints that precede us in this journey that is not yet undertaken as a path to holiness. The Beatification of Don Timoteo Giaccardo and of Don Giacomo Alberione has pointed this out to us as a path to holiness as many others and, for us, it is "the path," "our path". Hence we are urged to look up on the Apostle Paul, to draw from him our inspiration, and to be ourselves "St. Paul alive today."

Paul died between the years 64 and 68 of our era. If he were alive today, what would he have done? Last century, someone said that, if our Father should come back to the world, he would be a journalist. Dear brother, do you agree with this? Do you agree that we cannot simply repeat schemes, but instead let the spirit live again? Should we repeat but schemes, would we not be plaster casting or mummifying our Father?

At the start of his activity, Jesus shows up in the synagogue of Nazareth and reads Isaiah Chapter 71. After rolling back the scroll and having taken his seat to teach, he proclaims: "*Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing*" (cf. Lk 4:14-21). This "today" represents the fullness, the crowning. It is as if that Isaiah text had remained five centuries expecting for its full realization. When Jesus says, "today", this text has reached the age of maturity and fullness.

I am asking you if the same thing is taking place amongst us, when we affirm as our objective that of being St. Paul *alive today*. These two words – *alive* and *today* -- are our challenge and the goal that we ought to reach. The start of this millennium has its peculiarities and demands. No *today* is like yesterday, and if we want to be faithful to the Founder who wanted to do something for the welfare of people of the new century, we ought to pay attention to the appeals and the characteristics of this *today* of our history. Infidelity or indifference to *today* means infidelity and indifference to Paul, to Alberione, to the charisma, to this our specific path to holiness.

Following the model of our Father, author of the Letters to his communities, I desire to share with you, esteemed Pauline confrere, my intuitions and knowledge on the Apostle Paul in the form of a letter, in a familiar and fraternal style, after the taste of our Father and in a manner of expressing close to that of the first Fathers of the Church. Deliberately, I have set aside erudition and the

fineries in this writing in order to communicate something that may be of help in our common task of being “St. Paul alive today.”

Paul asserted his title of “*apostle*” only when it was extremely necessary. Instead of imposing himself and proving himself superior to others, he certainly preferred to see others as “friends,” “co-worker,” “fellow soldier,” “brothers” (cf. Phlm 1-2). Instead of asserting himself, he preferred to ask out of love (Phlm 9). He hoped that, acting in this manner, without any pretensions, he would not be misunderstood or loved less (2Cor 12:15). Would to God that we, too, might reach this objective.

I have chosen as title, *A memorial of Paul*. The word “memorial” is more pertinent than “memory”. This latter, if understood in the meaning of Greek philosophy, can be a mere remembrance of a distant past, perhaps unrecoverable, while “memorial,” a Biblical-Semitic concept, supposes re-living today what is remembered. As a song of my country says, “To remember is to live”. In other words, in order to understand that “memorial” is to re-live today something that has already been lived in the past, let us think of the Eucharist, the Easter memorial, wherein we re-live and actualize the central mystery of our faith. The Eucharist is memorial, and memorial is also the attempt of this text.

Eventually, without a rigorous order, you can also discover the “four wheels” of the “Pauline cart.”

STEPS OF A MEMORIAL IN ORDER TO BECOME ST. PAUL ALIVE TODAY

1. Paul, model of the consecrated person

Esteemed Pauline confrere, you know how highly our Founder regarded the Apostle Paul. This shows in all his writings and in each of his activities. He presented him to us as our model and Father. The Chaplet [to St. Paul] is certainly the text wherein Don Alberione expresses best his thought on the Apostle Paul. In fact, therein we have the great synthesis as who St. Paul was for him and what this apostle represents to us.

Certainly, you will agree with me on this aspect: Don Alberione dealt with St. Paul and his writings with so much freedom and intimacy to the point of seeing in them things that the majority of persons does not see. These are attitudes of men of God who transcend the rigid measure and the critical examination of the specialist or of the scholar. I tell you this because, strictly speaking, Paul and the consecrated life – as it is presented today – are not the same things to the critical eyes of the specialist. Besides, all the things from the Bible that are attributed to the consecrated life are, in the first place, appropriately directed to the formation of the ordinary Christian, and not specifically to the religious.

In spite of knowing these things, Don Alberione approaches Paul with a surprising intimacy and familiarity. In fact, he introduces him to us as the model of the consecrated person; as if to say that, living the way St. Paul lived, we Paulines of the third millennium shall be authentic consecrated persons.

As I was pointing out earlier, the text that brings us closer to this thought is the Chaplet to St. Paul. I think that its five points synthesize the best of Paul for us. They have the same outline: we praise Jesus for having made himself real in Paul; we address ourselves to Paul, by asking him that he obtains for us what Jesus achieved in him. The points with their themes are these: 1. Conversion; 2. Chastity (in the older text the word “virginity” appears); 3. Obedience; 4. Poverty; 5. Mission.

You shall have noticed how in points 2-3-4 the “evangelical counsels (chastity, obedience, poverty) show clearly. Aside from this, the first theme (conversion) is the starting point of Paul’s entire apostolic itinerary. Would it not be for the same reason that in our chapels we always have before our eyes this reminder of conversion? Hence, Paul is presented as one who, converted, professes the evangelical counsels.

There is no doubt that Paul did not make the profession of the evangelical counsels as we do, but the Founder, in his final petition of every point of the Chaplet, stimulates us to be “St. Paul alive today” in the manner similar to *consecrated* Paul.

I take note, in the arrangement of the Chaplet’s points, a tension to the final and culminating point, the mission. I think one can affirm that, like St. Paul, we should *continually* be converted (“*poenitens cor tenete*”) and that we profess the evangelical counsels in view of the mission. Hence, this is the motive and the goal of our process of conversion and of the practice of the religious vows. This makes me ask if, without a continuing process of conversion, we can be faithful to the Pauline mission today. Even more, I ask if it is possible to be Pauline without letting everything converge on the mission.

Perhaps you have already heard the conversion of Paul described as a slow process, and not as it is presented in the Acts of the Apostle (Chap. 9:22 and 26). From the literary point of view, they are more of narrations of vocation than of conversion. They are based on biblical narrations known as vocations. Saul’s conversion takes place slowly, in contact with new realities and new cultures, generating a new vision of the world, of persons, of things and also of God. Also with us, something similar takes place: the more contacts we have with today’s world – with its values and counter-values – the more we feel appealed to, the more urgently we shall feel the need of our mission.

2. Formed after Jesus Christ servant

Dear Pauline confrere, the memorial of our Father is being completed with some points that, to my mind, synthesize his spirituality, that is, the internal

dynamism that led him to consecrate his entire life to a cause. Of this we shall shortly speak.

When Paul asks Christ what he had to do, and disposes himself to follow orders, (Acts 9:6), he assumes the condition of a servant. He is servant also in the social sense, that is, he materially places himself in the category of those not remunerated, poor, contented at doing the will of their Lord.

We are used to consider much Paul the Apostle and little, Paul the Servant. I do have the impression that Paul feels more comfortable with the second title than with the first. He uses that of "apostle" only in special contexts. And he presents his social qualification as apostle by identifying with that of servant (1Cor 4:9-13). Servant of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1) and servant (*diakonos*) of the communities. (1Cor 3:5).

An important text referring to the "servant" of the communities is that of 1Cor 4:9-13 (cf. 2Cor 4:7-12; 11:21b-29). Servant is he who acts gratuitously, considering himself a debtor of all (Rom 1:14).

To be servant of all has its consequences and we have an eloquent demonstration in some texts that deserve further deepening: 1Cor 4:9-13; 2Cor 4:7-12; 11:21b-29.

The spirituality of Paul servant is mirrored in that of Jesus Christ, the obedient servant even to the death on the cross (Phil 2:6 -11; a text based on Isaiah 52:13-53,12, the fourth canticle of the servant). The theme "Paul servant" becomes clear if we establish the following comparative table, traced in the Letter to the Philippians:

<i>Status of Jesus Christi:</i> Equality with God (2:6)	<i>Status of Paul:</i> Blameless Pharisee (3:6)
<i>Option of Jesus Christ:</i> To empty himself (2:7)	<i>Option of Paul:</i> To empty himself, to lose all, trash (3:8)
<i>Consequences for Jesus Christ:</i> Became servant (2:7) Obedient till death (2:8)	<i>Consequences for Paul:</i> Became servant (1:1) Ready to die (1:21-23)
<i>Result for Jesus Christ:</i> Glorified with the resurrection (2:9)	<i>Expectations of Paul:</i> He runs in search of the resurrection (3:11)

3. A different priesthood

The Chaplet to St. Paul suggests a radical equality in our Congregation, granted that everyone is called to be like the Father of all in the diversity of gifts and in the unity of charism. Starting from here, you may ask: Where is the dif-

ference between the Priest and the Disciple? There is no difference. We are a community of equals: the five points of the Chaplet is applied to every person.

Strictly speaking, Paul was a lay person. Perhaps you never gave a lot of importance to this fact. However, if we admit that the ministerial priesthood comes directly from the apostles who received Christ's mandate during the last supper, we find ourselves face to face with some provocative questions.

Without getting into the merit of the matter – our objective is not to be polemical and neither to speak about the ministry of the orders, -- I think that it is opportune to reflect on a forgotten text of St. Paul; forgotten by us, but certainly not by Don Alberione. I refer to Rom 15:16, and I think that all Paulines should always have it before their eyes, and engraved in their souls, granted that it is the clearest text as regards a different priesthood, the priesthood of Paul. (Other texts on this sense are: Rom 1:9; Phil 2:17. It is important to also remember 1Cor 1,17).

Among other things, in Chapter 15 of the Letter to the Romans, Paul traces some plans for the new areas of evangelization (he aims at making Rome the jumping board to reach Spain). According to the Apostle, in Asia, there is no longer an area for action, and he seeks to be coherent with his principle of not reaping where others have sown, that is, to be a pioneer and one who opens new paths (cf. 2Cor 10:15 -16).

About the year 56, twenty-five years after his "conversion," Paul writes to the Romans of his "conversion". In agreement with the Acts of the Apostles, he is about to return from his third journey, after having founded numerous communities (certainly more numerous than those referred to in the Acts) and after having written the majority of his Letters (or at least the more important ones). Hence what he writes does not have the characteristic of something cast into the dark; on the contrary, it is the confirmation of a certainty, that which comes from his twenty years of evangelization. He writes in Greek, and says:

εἰς τὸ εἶναι με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἰς τὰ ἔθνη, ἱεραουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἵνα γένηται ἡ προσφορά τῶν ἐθνῶν εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἡγιασμένη ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

Translation: "... because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Jesus to the Gentiles in performing the priestly service (literally being engaged in a role of worship) of the gospel of God, so that offering up of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the holy Spirit".

I call your attention, esteemed Pauline confrere, on a significant detail of this text. Observe the cultic, priestly, and I would say, Eucharistic language therein. In the first place the word "*leitourgon*", from which *liturgy* is derived, and here I translated it as "ministry". Paul is presenting his "liturgy," his "ministry". He calls himself "*leitourgon Christou Iesou*", that is, minister of Christ Jesus, with a very clear destination, "*eis ta ethne*", that is to nations and to those who do not know Jesus Christ.

The verb "*hierourgounta*", which I translated as "sacred function," literally means "to serve as priest," and it defines what Paul intends as his priesthood: to proclaim God's Good News. It is a true liturgy, with offerings presented to God and sanctified by the Spirit. In fact, the word "*prosphora*" (offering, what the priest presents) is proper to worship, and Paul believes that this human offering (the pagans) receives in heaven the same attention as the sacrificial offerings: that it may be accepted (*euprosdektos*) and sanctified (*hegiasmene*) by the Holy Spirit.

With a minimum of effort, esteemed Pauline confrere, we have arrived at the observation that Paul considers himself bearer of a priesthood of a new kind, we would call it "charismatic," not ordained, which is evangelization. He exercises this priesthood not in temples or sanctuaries, but among the nations; it does not celebrate a rite wherein common offerings (bread and wine: certainly also these in its Eucharistic celebrations), but his apostolate is a liturgy wherein the offerings presented are summed up in the pagans' obedience to the faith. A little further on, Paul affirms: "*For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to lead the Gentiles to obedience by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit [of God]...*" (Rom 15:18-19a). The pagans' obedience of faith is the result of Paul's priesthood. He achieved his priesthood in the "world," in the streets, in contact with other cultures and races, by proclaiming to them Jesus Christ. This was his liturgy, this is his priesthood, this is his conviction after twenty years of contacts with other cultures and races.

Esteemed Pauline confrere, with this I want to point out that in our Congregation there exists a priesthood that makes us equal: the proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who have not heard of Him spoken. Do you believe that we, Paulines, feel bearers of this priesthood? In truth, that we, Paulines, make of our work table the altar of our priesthood?

4. Multi-cultural formation

Esteemed Pauline confrere, let us now reflect on the multi-cultural formation of the Apostle, our Father.

In the first place, one ought to remember that Paul was born in the Diaspora, that is, outside the territorial confines of the Palestine of the New Testament. The Jews born in the Diaspora tended to recognize more the existing values in other cultures and realities. It is true that Paul speaks of himself as "Pharisee" (Phil 3:5), a word which means "set apart," but I think that he may have become a Pharisee through the influence of Gamaliel, his teacher (Acts 22,3). The author of the Acts makes us understand that Paul refers to himself as "*Pharisee and son of Pharisees*" (Acts 23:6), but you certainly know that Luke is not a reporter or a historian as regards Paul. I prefer to believe that Saul chose

to become a Pharisee after he had moved to Jerusalem, in order to be trained as a teacher with the teacher Gamaliel. The mere fact that he had studied with Gamaliel is of great importance to Paul's formation; certainly, he must have learned from Gamaliel, among other things, to be tolerant and not intransigent.

Have you already discovered how tolerant is Paul in his Letters?

The Jews of the Diaspora, in spite of their living separated from the inside of the Roman Empire, were potentially more tolerant and open to other cultures. The inevitable and frequent contact with an other, the different, having to speak a language that is not the mother tongue, and many other factors, were forming a conscience and a mentality new in everything as regards everything: persons, things, the world... One can affirm that the Jew of the Diaspora does not think and act exactly as a Jew in Jerusalem thinks and acts. The Jew of Jerusalem looks at the world from the point of view of his small Jewish world, seeing the others as potential enemies, especially if importance is given to the "religion" of the pure/impure. For him, the navel of the world is Jerusalem. The vision of the Jew of the Diaspora is another matter. For him, the world has no navel.

To bear in mind these details is important for our globalized times. Do you remember those days when it was said: "Let's do what is done in Alba"?

Another important aspect in Paul's multi-cultural formation is the fact of his being born in a metropolis, Tarsus. (Here we do not need to ask for excuse if in case one is born in a village, because today the world enters into our homes, thanks to the media). As a child, an adolescent and a young citizen of Tarsus, Paul had contacts with other cultures and manners of thinking. It is enough to remember that in Tarsus, there were philosophical schools of influential groups, as the Stoics, the Cynics and the Epicureans.

I think that one cannot underestimate this aspect. In fact, if we attentively read Paul's Letters, it shall be possible to discover in his writing influences of such schools. For example, how can one not recognize the Stoics' principle of the *ataraxia* in this phrase, "*I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me*" (Phil 4:13) or the principle of the *autarcheia* in the same Letter, when he says: "*I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things...*" (Phil 4:12)? Luke himself shows Paul in contact with such schools of thought (cf. Acts 17:18). We shall go back to this topic below, while speaking of the enculturated language for the big metropolises, the pulpit of Paul's preaching.

Even when young, Paul had contacts with what was better in terms of cultural and academic formation. It is enough to remember the role of the synagogue in the life of all the Jewish children: from five years old, the child began his contact with the written alphabet, until when, emancipated by the rite of *bar mizvá*, he could read in public the *Torah* and to preach. As regards academic training, Paul could utilize optimal conditions, that is, to go to the great teachers of Jerusalem and learn from them, especially from Gamaliel. Aside from

this, Paul specialized (and mingled) in the difficult and complicated fineries of the Rabbinic thought. At a distance of two thousand years, it is difficult for us to understand certain passages of the Letters to the Galatians and to the Romans, precisely because therein are found exemplary modes of the Rabbinic reflection and style, which the majority of us does not know and thus not appreciate.

Paul's multi-cultural formation is shown also in his knowledge and dominion over languages. Every language is at the same time fruit and consequence of a culture. Obviously, Paul knew his mother languages, Aramaic and Hebrew. During his time, Aramaic was no longer current, but his studies made in Jerusalem supposes knowledge of the Old Testament language. Speaking Aramaic, knowing Hebrew, writing in Greek and quoting the Old Testament in its most ancient version, the *Septuagint*, the Apostle, our Father can easily be appreciated for the versatility and training he availed with for expressing himself appropriately. A man of the Semitic culture, Paul expresses orally and in written Greek, quoting the Greek Bible, a sign that he knew that well and even better the original language.

We do not know whether Paul also spoke Latin, the language of the Roman Empire. We can believe he did. Nonetheless, more than acknowledging him as a polyglot, it is important to consider our Father as one who is not afraid of contact with other cultures; on the contrary, he knows, dominates them and makes use of them for his specific objective, evangelization.

From all this, esteemed Pauline confrere, one can deduce that the academic and cultural training of Paul was not wanting at all. In the Acts, Luke presents him as a great orator (e.g., 17:22-31). A little more humble, Paul recognizes himself as not a good orator, but he possesses a good compendium of knowledge: "*Even if I am untrained in speaking, I am not so in knowledge*" (2Cor 11:6a). His vast knowledge was not always useful to him. It seems that, on the occasion of the foundation of the Galatian communities, he had difficulty in verbal communication, due to his lack of knowledge of some dialects. The following quote gives us the impression that he took recourse on visual language: "*...you, before whose eyes a clear description of Jesus Christ crucified*" (Gal 3:1b).

5. Citizen of the world

We are accustomed to think of Paul as a Roman citizen and so we run the risk of narrowing his "citizenship". In my opinion, he was more of a citizen of the world, a defender of equal citizenship for all, without discrimination as regards to race, social class or sex (cf. Gal 3:28). It seems to me that this is an important aspect for our globalized world.

One question that disturbs some scholars of Paul is the fact that he does not mention at all his Roman citizenship. It is Luke who introduces him as a

Roman citizen (Acts 16:37) since birth, that is, an title inherited from his father (22:25-29). Nonetheless, Paul in his letters never mentions this fact. Probably it was Luke, about fifteen years after Paul's death, to attribute to him this title. As we know, the author of the Acts proposes to offer a peaceful outlook on the relationship between Paul and the Roman Empire, and this because Luke does not see the Empire as a menace for the Christians. It seems strange, however, that Paul's parent, who, in Luke's vision, was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), had the title of Roman citizenship, something transmitted to his son.

For this and for other motives, I prefer to see in our Father one who went beyond this title of citizenship, thus appearing as a citizen of the world. More so if we bear in mind his experience in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-3): of his contact with the Hellenists, his journeys and other aspects of his life.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul had a kind of preparatory missionary "*stage*" before starting his travels to the world and its provocative realities. Paul would make of this city (among the principal ones of the Roman Empire) and of the community that inhabits there, as the starting point and the point of arrival of his journeys, while sharing with its members his projects, joys and hopes.

The profile of the Christian community of Antioch of Syria is very interesting and immediately it is distinguished from the Christians of Jerusalem. Even more: this community is a kind of alternative proposal to the reactionary closing in of some groups of Jerusalem. In the Letters, Paul speaks only once of Antioch of Syria (Gal 2,11), but it is all that it takes to show the tension between the two ways of seeing things and of evangelizing. Let us then allow ourselves that Acts 11:19-26 and 13:1-3 orient us in our reflection.

The rise of this community took place after the persecution against the Christians of Jerusalem, provoked by Stephen's death. It seems Stephen was the head of the group of Jews, followers of Jesus, of Greek language and culture, called "Hellenists" (Acts 6:1; 9:26). With the death of their leader (6:8 - 8:1), this spread *outside* the "sacred territory," by migrating to Phoenicia, to the island of Cyprus and in the city of Antioch of Syria. At the beginning they try to proclaim the word to the Jews, but immediately, they turned to the pagans, persons who, in general, had the same roots and the same culture as they. In fact, Luke underlines that the initiative to preach Jesus Christ to the Greeks begins from persons born in Cyrene (Africa) and Cyprus. According to this indication, there are persons from the two continents, African and Asian (according to the criterion of that time).

The church of Jerusalem, having known the fact, sends a kind of "visitor," Barnabas. The Acts does not speak about the intentions of the communities of Jerusalem in sending Barnabas to Antioch of Syria, but we can at least suspect a little diffidence (later, with Peter's arrival, there is a change of attitude - see Gal 2:13 - as if he betrayed the expectations of Jerusalem in sending him). For Luke, it was there that the first Christian community abroad had

arisen, and through the initiative of the Hellenists who adhered to Jesus. Barnabas must have remained visibly impressed by what he saw. The Acts praise him, saying that he was a good person, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

Meanwhile, Paul lives in his home city, Tarsus, and Barnabas knows it. He goes to take him and together they go to Antioch of Syria, where they live and work for one year in this community. This year of living together and of work of evangelization in the big city must have been extremely fruitful for Paul and Barnabas. The two were Jews, but they began to express their own faith in an “international” community where experiences, ways of life and different cultural elements converge. This must have been of primary importance for the fermentation of the Christian novelty, different from what was happening in Jerusalem, where Jesus’ followers were still bound to the Temple, to circumcision, to the Law, to the Jewish rites and also to the prescriptions as regards what is pure or impure.

It is in this sense that the community of Antioch of Syria becomes an “alternative: in relation to that of Jerusalem. In this city, a new wind blew, something that does not happen in Jerusalem. It shall not be too much to insist on the peculiarity of this community in the big pagan city wherein novelty and the alternative ferment. And Paul is here, learning, working and sharing... It is not possible to forget the change of attitudes in Paul: from hostility at the time of Stephen’s death (6:8 - 8:1), and now an attitude of peaceful coexistence and of communion with the Hellenists.

The Acts affirm that in this city and in the community the first (and definitive) attempt to identify the followers of Christ takes place: they began to be called “Christians”. This new identity shows that the followers of Jesus are not an appendix to Judaism. Indeed, they are born here, but now they have their own identity: they are Christians. This gigantic step took place in an “international” community wherein persons of different realities and cultures find for themselves a common denominator, a giver of identity: they are *Christians*. Paul is most responsible for this reality. Perhaps it was he who was the great animator of all this. Or is it that he was in this community as an apprentice? We do not know. It seems that he may have learned more how to teach, or perhaps, he may have learned more than he taught.

This multi-cultural and multi-racial community (Acts 13:1) produced unthought-of effects. If not for it (through the initiative of the Hellenists), Christianity, left to the responsibility of the community of Jerusalem alone, perhaps would be already dead or would have remained an appendix to Judaism. Instead, thanks to the community of Antioch and to its vision of the world understood as a structure where to build Christ’s body, Christianity no longer has geographical, cultural or racial confines.

The Acts say that in the community of Antioch of Syria, there were “prophets and teachers” (13:1). It is precisely through these “prophets” that the Holy Spirit seeks the choice of Barnabas and Paul for a special mission (13:2b).

This call of the Spirit is not something magical because he always acts in history through persons. In Antioch of Syria is born the mission beyond the geographical, cultural or racial confines. And Paul shall be involved in person (journeys) and shall always remain bound to this community.

Having these pieces of information and presuppositions, one will notice, esteemed Pauline confrere, how reductive it is to think of Paul only as a Roman citizen, and not consider him, as he in fact is, as citizen of the world. To us these consequences seem obvious: we have a vocation that goes beyond the frontiers of the territory wherein we were born. In this sense, we ought to consider ourselves citizens of the world. It is clear that it is not merely a matter of having a special passport, but of having an international attitude and vision, in view of the greater objective: evangelization.

6. A new form of evangelization: the Letters

My esteemed Pauline confrere, if we should ask how many were the communities founded by our Father, we would not have an exact reply. Paul founded other communities aside from those known from the Acts of the Apostles, and he certainly wrote other Letters that were eventually lost.

As it is known, the Letters are not the first step in the process of evangelization undertaken by Paul. He had the habit of personally visiting a region, preferring a big urban center, without having to harvest where others had sown (2Cor 10:13 - 15; Rom 15:23 -24). When he could, he visited the communities personally (Acts 15:36) or he sent one of his collaborators (2Cor 8:16-18; 12:18). Only in case of impossibility for a visit of one of his collaborators, does Paul send a Letter to the community, seeking to explain further, clarify, encourage, exhort, correct, etc. (cf. 1Thes 3:10).

All the authentically Pauline Letters (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon) were written before the Gospels had appeared. Traditionally, it is accepted that Mark's Gospel appeared in the year 68, the date limit for locating Paul's death (between the year 64 and 68). Esteemed Pauline confrere, take note: Paul is he who inaugurated the written New Testament. His first text, the first Letter to the Thessalonians, must be dated at the start of the year 51. It is there, with Paul, that the first book of the New Testament appears.

It is nonetheless interesting to underline how creative is Paul in the process of evangelization. With absolute certainty, we can affirm that he was the pioneer in the use of a Letter as means of communication between him and the communities, and also among the communities (Col 4:16).

Evidently, our Father Paul is not the inventor of the letter, as means of communication whose origins are lost in the darkness of the past. Paul, in the language of Don Alberione, was a perspicacious man who "used the fastest and

most efficacious means for doing good." Even more, we can apply to him what Pope Paul VI said of the Founder, while showing him as one who gave to the Church new forms of expressing herself. I think that we ought never to lose sight of this innovative aspect of communication on the part of our Father, if we want to be St. Paul alive today.

In this sense, it is good to note how Paul makes use of the network of communication created by the Roman Empire. One of the characteristics of the Empire was the opening of roads that united the big urban centers of that time. The roads served, among other things, for the speedy travel of the forces of occupation, for the speedy passage of the tributes and for the swiftness of communication among cities and provinces of the Empire.

Along such roads, every about thirty kilometers, there were post stations, with lodging services and change of horses. With this facilities, a functionary of a specific province could communicate with others through letters, with a speed that would make today's mail service envious.

I am convinced, esteemed Pauline confrere, that Paul made use of this network of communication for the ends of evangelization in his journeys and in order to communicate with the communities. Evidently, all this required the collaboration of persons (Phil 2:19, 25) and monetary contributions. We do not need to show it here.

I hold as well that Luke, in describing these Paul's journeys in the Acts, may have intended to characterize each of these journeys. Let us take this with a certain precaution, knowing that the author of the Acts, in describing Paul's journeys, reconstructed in his own way a "theology of the mission". Paul's third journey, (approximately the years 53-57) is described Acts 18:22-21,16, and he makes us know that the Apostle, accustomed to not having fixed abode (1Cor 4:11), remains almost three years in the big city of Ephesus (Acts 19:10 and above all 20:31). For Luke, the characteristic of the third journey is bound to Ephesus, the capital of Asia, and during the long time when Paul lives there: "*...all the inhabitants of the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord, Jews and Greeks alike*" (19:10). Using an image of our time, Ephesus became, with the Apostle's presence, a kind of large broadcasting station or the Word's transmission antenna, from where the images and messages were sent to the whole of Asia.

Luke practically ignores the conflicts that our Father had to face in this metropolis. He barely speaks of a tumult (19:23-41), minimizing its effects and showing Paul retreating from the city after those conflicts (20:1). Writing to the Corinthians, Paul draws with lively colors and bright shades the conflicts faced in the capital of Asia, leaving to understand that the events were much harder: "*...If at Ephesus I fought with beasts, so to speak, what benefit was it to me?*" (1Cor 15:32a); "*...We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction that came to me in the province of Asia; we were utterly weighed down beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, we had accepted within ourselves the sentence of death,*

that we might trust not in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. He rescued us from such great danger of death, and he will continue to rescue us; in him, we have put our hope [that] he will also rescue us again” (2Cor 1:8-10).

Paul’s description was more vivid, crude and harsh. Taking this as basis, the majority of scholars tend to admit an imprisonment of Paul in Ephesus, thus justifying the exaggerated permanence of three years in that city. And, founded on this hypothesis, they point at Ephesus as the place wherein some Letters from the prisons (Philippians, Philemon, and perhaps also Colossians and Ephesians) were written.

Regardless of this, Paul’s period of permanence in Ephesus coincides also with the date wherein were written the other Letters, like Galatians 1 Corinthians and part of 2 Corinthians (if we accept that 2 Corinthians is a composite of at least five Letters written at different times). Hence, the Letters are an essential part of the principal characteristic of the third journey.

Was not Paul imprisoned? Probably, yes. Nonetheless, as another text attributed to him would state, *“But the word of God is not chained”* (2 Tm 2:9b). To this is added a growing group of collaborators that Paul keeps outside the prison, capable of giving great dynamism to the expansion of evangelization (1 Cor 16:15 - 20; 2 Cor 8,6,16; Phil 1:14 - 18; 2:19,25; Eph 6:21-22; Col 4:7-17; Phlm 23-24).

Hence, Paul was not held back by the traditional means of communication, such as oral preaching and catechesis. He was an innovator in the field of evangelization, by introducing in his pastoral activities this new form of communication, the Letters. Then, let us recognize it, a large part of the memory of his pastoral actions and of his theology has reached us thanks to the Letters that he wrote.

So much here as much later, when we shall deal with the relationship “Paul and the women”, it is good to recall Paul’s capacity to coordinate a network of collaborators, an urgent topic for the survival and the growth of our Congregation and mission in the world. The beginning of the Letter to the Colossians (supposing that it was written by Paul) indicates that our Father did not take it as a problem to be physically present in all the communities. Therein, in fact, is remembered Epaphra, “companion in service” of Paul and founder of a community in Colossus, with which Paul feels profoundly bound through the communion with Epaphra. This theme always opens for us, ever more, apostolic cooperation, especially with the lay persons.

7. Language acculturated in the big cities

Jesus of Nazareth grew, lived and preached the coming of the Kingdom in a relatively small region called Galilee. Mark shows him as coming from Nazareth (1:9) and returning to Galilee (1:14), where he announces his life program

(1,15). The Synoptic Gospels present him as an adult who goes to Jerusalem only during the final days of his earthly life, that is, during his passion, death and resurrection. Little is known of Nazareth, the village where he has grown, in fact it is ignored by the Old Testament. Nathanael (Jn 1:46) shows all the pre-conceptions that weigh on those who have their roots in this obscure village of Galilee.

The inhabitants of Nazareth know Jesus since his infancy, and they recognize him as *tekton* (Mk 6:3), a Greek word that we normally translate carpenter, though it comprises a ray of meanings including that of woodworker and of one learned in bricklaying. As a *tekton*, Jesus certainly must have gone across Galilee, the Decapolis and Phoenicia, seek work, which probably explains why later, when he starts to proclaim the proximity of the Kingdom, he feels comfortable in whatever house he enters, also in pagan territory (7:24ff).

The cultural world of Jesus is practically limited to Galilee and, more specifically, to the Galilean farmers, audience of his discourses. According to Mark, his language is bound to the soil (4:3ff; 12:1ff) and to the sea, the two realities out of which the Galileans drew their daily sustenance. In short, Jesus was a man bound to the rural culture, to the workaday of the people of the villages. And it is strange that the Gospels do not tell us anything of Jesus' relationship with major and "modern" cities like, for example, Sephoris and Caesarea.

I think, esteemed Pauline confrere, that abiding by the Synoptics, rarely did Jesus come in contact and even in confrontation with other cultures. Paul, on the contrary is a Jew from the Diaspora, a man born in a big city and familiar with large urban centers of the Roman Empire (Tarsus, the two Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Rome...). To reach large urban centers was part of his pastoral strategy, to create in them a Christian nucleus capable of generating other nuclei (2 Cor 10:15 -16), and then move on to other fronts, while refusing to reap where he had not sown. He is irritated by the indolence of the Corinthians, who continue to quarrel among themselves without carrying out the mission of being a fruit-bearing ferment of the whole of Achaia (2 Cor 10:16).

In this regard, I think that we have not yet discovered the importance that the theme "Paul and the big cities," has for us and the challenge it raises for our Congregation. At times we have the sensation that the pioneering spirit of our Father no longer has any reason to exist.

Little did the villages matter to Paul, having the certainty that, sooner or later, they would have received the message through the capillary action of the communities born in the big urban centers. (It is what he desires in 2 Cor 10:16, and which is partially achieved; in fact, 2 Cor 9 seems to be a circular note for the communities of Achaia). The Apostle's interest is for the major cities. This option, however, is accompanied by challenges. To understand this, it is enough to think of the great metropolises of our time. The big cities produces a culture which has little to do with the farms. Today we find children who do not even

know where their food comes from. It is enough just to see children of our metropolises get enchanted by the beauty of nature, by animals and plants from where the farmer draws food to feed everyone.

Something similar, though on smaller scale, happened during Paul's time. The urban person had another point of reference, another vision of the world, another culture. It is to this specific person that Paul addresses himself, accepting the challenge to speak of a rural artisan, as Jesus was, to persons of an urban culture.

In this regard, was our Father successful? I believe so. If you, dear Pauline confrere, read Paul's Letters with this preoccupation, you shall certainly notice Paul's effort to adequately speak to persons of another culture. It must not have been difficult for him granted that he was a citizen of Tarsus, a large center of urban culture during that time. Perhaps for us the difficulty shall be greater if we have our roots in villages, when we attempt to make the passage from the rural culture of the Gospels to the urban culture of our megalopolises.

Below, I will present an exposition as to how Paul uses an enculturated message or, better still, how he re-creates the message starting from the various cultural values of the big cities. For example, he speaks of the architect (1 Cor 3:10-17), of spectacles in the arena (4:9; cf. with 2 Cor 4: 8 -10), of the pedagogue (1 Cor 4:15; Rom 3:24), of the buying (redemption) of slaves in the market (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Gal 3:13; 4,5; Rom 3:24). In his writings are present sports contests, an element that is completely alien to the Jewish culture of the time (athletics: 1Cor 9:24-27; Phil 3:13-14; 2Tm 4:7; boxing: 1Cor9:26b). He takes a point of reference the soldier(armed: Eph 6:10-17; winner: 2 Tm 4:7); he speaks about musical instruments (1 Cor 14:7-8); he is aware and knows that the people appreciate military parades of victorious generals (2 Cor 2:14-16). He takes the example of the "columns" of memorable deeds of heads of state in order to speak of his own "deeds" of which one has to be proud (2 Cor 11:23-38; on this matter, see Trajan's column at the historical center of Rome.

It is clear that we have ahead of us a great cultural challenge because the major population concentration in countries is found in big urban centers, generators of a culture that no longer dialogues with the rural culture present in the Gospels. Would it not be the case of studying better the Letters of our Father in order that we may become effective in our mission?

8. Openness to the mentality of the time: The search for truth

You are aware, esteemed Pauline confrere, that in these two thousand years, various readings of Paul have been done. Some of them, unfortunately, were distorted or at the service of preconceptions, even theological ones. For example, take the case of the dogmatizing reading of Paul's texts. With the expression *dogmatizing reading*, I want to say this: at times, to justify a position or a

prior dogmatic declaration, reference is made to Paul, as if they were the biblical basis of such dogmatic declaration. He who does this, presupposes that Paul thought exactly as one does. The risk of this procedure is much, because someone can pretend that Paul justifies dogmatic positions that, in reality, had no room in his daily pastoral worries for the communities.

With this procedure, we completely transform the profile of our Father. In such a case, he would cease being one who dialogues and seeks with others the truth in order to become the master of truth; one who has the ready answer for all the problems that concern the life of the communities and even of humanity itself. Also today, for some people, Paul is this master of the truth. Do you think, dear Pauline confrere, how this strange image of our Father is rejected by our fragmented post-modern world, wherein every person builds his own truth, while rejecting those who introduce themselves as masters of ready and definite truths. If what I am saying has some sense, you shall see how our Father can become unwelcome in our post-modern world, characterized, among other things, by subjectivity.

With this, I do not pretend to trivialize things, as if Paul were not a man of profound convictions. Certainly, he possessed a broad framework of convictions that gave him directions in action and in the Letters that he wrote. This is not the place for us to further develop these convictions because I believe that all of us know them, even if in various degrees. It is not a matter of arguing on the differences between conviction and certainty. What is important is to recognize in Paul a man open to dialogue and to the common search of the truth.

As for me, even if I run the risk, I prefer to see and present our Father as a man of dialogue with the world and the culture of his time. To continue presenting him as teacher of truth is to continue to see him as an intransigent Pharisee. As a Pharisee, yes, Paul was one who bore and defended a composite of untouchable truths. (See, for example, that which seems an intransigent Pharisaical principle in Col 2:21). As follower of Jesus Christ, it seems to me that this rigid and intransigent position has disappeared. As a Christian, Paul is more tolerant and open to dialogue than as a Pharisee.

It is good, for example, to read what he says in the first Letter, when he directs the emerging community of the Thessalonians as how to behave in a pluralistic society: *“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good.”*(2Thes 3,19-21). Evidently, this exhortation was meant, in the first place to the internal relations of the community. We can, however, ask if it does not mirror, in some way, the common search of truth, with the possibility of at times out stepping one’s community. From the thematic point of view, the exhortation seems to be the echo of the respectful and tolerant position of Gamaliel, Paul’s professor, according to the Acts of the Apostles (5:34 - 39; 22:3).

More interesting yet is Paul’s request in Phil 1:9-10: *“And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of percep-*

tion, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ". Let it be noted that to *discern* or *distinguish* is said in Greek as *dokimazein*, a verb that is used to mean to *subject to proof* the prophetic pronouncements; *what is of value* is rendered as *ta diapheronta*, and it literally means "the things that are different; this expression is closely linked with the Stoic ethics (that is, with the principle of *adiaphora* = things that are neither good nor bad). Paul believes that the Philippians can arrive at the discovery of what is better for them.

Also when Paul already has some decisions taken and from which he does not desist, as in the case referred to in 1Cor 5, one can notice the preoccupation to involve the community, so that the decision be a fruit of consensus. It is good to remember that in the area of ethics Paul is severe only on sexual matters and of idolatry. Outside these, he always insists on the importance of Christian freedom.

The desire of searching together is perceivable in many texts, as for example in the great effort of having dialogue with the Hellenistic culture as regards the resurrection from the dead (1Cor 15), a subject extremely difficult for persons of Greek mentality to accept. In the Letter to the Colossians (which some consider as not directly Pauline) one can discover a different vision of the world (Paul does not discuss or deny the existence of *eons*) and, on the other hand, one notices the desire that everyone may meet at the truth.

As we have already seen, Paul discovers values in other cultures and makes them his own while recommending to the communities to do the same. It is the case of the *autarcheia* and of the *ataraxia*, important themes of the philosophical schools of that time. Luke himself shows us Paul in contact with the Epicureans and the Stoics (Acts 17:18), the two principal schools of philosophy at that time. In his speech at the aeropagus, Luke presents him while quoting Aratus, a poet of the 3rd century B. C.: "*For we too are God's offspring*" (17:28; this thought is found as well in Cleantus). Besides, it would be important to pay attention to the manner with which Luke presents Paul in dialogue with the cultures in the second part of the Acts (cf., for example, the information of Acts 19:9: "... and began to hold daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus").

Dogmatism rejects the possibility that the Letters of Paul are occasional texts, and that many of these are conditioned by a well specified culture and places.

Paul did not like being defined "teacher" (*didaskalos*) of nations (*doctor gentium*): this title barely appears in a deutero-Pauline letter (1Tm 2:7; cf. 2Tm 1:11) and it does not point out the importance of one who knows everything, but of a kind of "master of evangelization among the pagans." If Paul does not like being called "teacher," what would have been his preference? It seems that the preferred title is that of "father" and "mother" of persons and of the communities he founded (see e.g., 1Ts 2:7.11-12; 1Cor 4:15-16; 2Cor 6:13; 12:14-15; Gal 4:19). He feels more at ease that way, as father and mother, than as teacher and

doctor. In this sense it is good to pay attention to this detail: the text of 1Cor 9:4-6,12,18 is that where Paul uses more the word *exousia* (power/authority), and it is precisely the chapter where he renounces all the prerogatives or privileges of the title "apostle" and of every authority that comes with it.

The most common form of treatment in the Letters of Paul is that of "brother". It seems that it is he who is the creator of this mentality for the Christian communities. The word "brother" evidently generates new relationships, among equals. It is worth going over all his Letters in order to underline this and other fraternal modes of relationship.

9. Work with women

The theme of relationships invites us, dear Pauline confrere, to briefly go over the manner with which our Father behaved with women. Also here we have an important task. In the first place, to liberate Paul from the stigma of being a misogynist, and, in the second place, to follow his steps without ignoring the charismatic heritage of our Father on this point.

The theme "Paul and the Christian women" is broad enough in the course of the Letters. It is as well culturally conditioned. The same biblical reading that he does to justify certain attitudes is due to the times, to the culture and to the vision that he had of things (e.g., the "exegesis" 1Cor 11:2-16).

The fact that Paul distanced himself from the synagogue (it is not possible to establish clearly the date; perhaps after a long process) had a capital importance for the emancipation of the Christian woman. In fact, if in the synagogue, women had but passive roles, the same thing cannot be said when it comes to the home. Here, she feels free, and is the "lady of the house." She can welcome people, coordinate and preside on the domestic church that gathers under her roof. The case of Lydia of Philippi is its exemple (Acts 16:11-15). It is worth recalling that, later, while writing to the Philippians, Paul asks the two women, Evodia and Syntyche, to make peace (4:2). This first domestic church of Europe, was it perhaps the first under the leadership of these two women? The start of the Letter (1:1) speaks about the "overseers" and the "ministers," which do not exactly correspond to today's sacred orders (episcopate and diaconate). And so, what would have been the role of these women in the community? Why does Paul accept more than once the economic help of the Philippians (see Phil 4:10-20; 2Cor 11:0)? Why is this Letter among the first when it comes to tenderness, affection and joy?

The texts that refer to this topic are many. As we could see, Paul had an immense esteem of women, and to consider him a misogynist or anti-feminist is at least unfair. One can affirm that his vision of women was culturally conditioned (just like ours). Nonetheless, he made gigantic steps in a clearly patriarchal context, one of marginalization of women..

When we deal with this theme, I think that one should start from the great conviction which animated Paul's entire life and which we find expressed in Gal 3:28: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" This is the point of departure of all the reflection on "Paul and the Christian women." The examination of this verse leads us to a baptismal formula that Paul's communities knew. In other words, when adults were baptized and introduced into the Christian community, the place wherein new relationships is lived and where something new is generated, they received this "life program" that they had to follow: eliminated all forms of discrimination and exclusion due to race, to social condition or to sex. All were included and no one had to feel excluded. This is what Paul thought as regards women. Did he succeed in introducing it in practice? Yes and no. And this is what we shall try to demonstrate.

First of all, let us recall that it is precisely he who compares himself to a mother who gives birth and nourishes (1Thes 2:7-8; 1Cor 3:2; Gal 4:19). In the original Greek of the letter to Philemon, we read thrice the word "womb," ("my heart"), a womanly characteristic, translated in different modes in our versions (at a first instance it was referred to the bowels of Christians, consoled by the solidarity of Philemon, in the other two it refers to Paul: verses 7,12,20).

An important text to further deepen this theme is Chapter 16 of the Letters to the Romans. Let it be remembered that scholars doubt whether this chapter were a part of the Letter or not. Some simply consider it an out-of-place text; others think that all the collaborators mentioned could better be located if their place were Ephesus or Rome. This discussion is not important in our case. What matters is to take note of the number of women mentioned by Paul and the recognition he expresses to them.

In the first place, we have to remember Phoebe, deaconess of the church of Cenchreae (Rom 16:1-2). Perhaps she is the only deaconess cited in the Pauline texts (cf. also what is said in 1Tm 3:11). As it is known Cenchreae is one of the ports of Corinth. Undoubtedly, Phoebe was Paul's "daughter". The majority of scholars opine that it was she who brought Paul's Letter to the Romans, rather, she may have preceded him in order to organize Paul's trip to Spain (Rom 15:24,28). Perhaps it is for this reason that Paul, aside from asking the Romans to welcome her, adds this directive: "... *help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well*" (16:2b). If Paul were not capable of appreciating and giving value to the capacity of women, he would not have done this.

Eventually, Paul makes reference to the couple Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, his companions of the times in Corinth (Acts 18:2-3) and in Ephesus (18:18-21). The journeys of this couple for the sake of the Gospel are well known. Expelled from Rome, they live with Paul in Corinth and in Ephesus, and they go back to Rome. In the culture of that time, it was habitual to mention first the husband's name and then that of the wife. In Rom 16:3, Paul breaks the

protocol and mentions first the woman's name (Prisca) and then the husband's. This subtle detail makes us suppose that Prisca was more involved than her husband. And Paul gives her due recognition.

He sends his greetings to Mary, while appreciating the work she did for the community (16:6). He remembers another couple, Andronicus and Junia, of whom we know nothing more than what is mentioned: that they were converted before Paul, and were his companions in prison and are his relatives (perhaps simply "Jews", 16:7). Let a detail be noted: Paul calls this couple "*prominent among the apostles*". It is well known that at that time there were a group of Christian conservatives, bound to the Church of Jerusalem, who considered as *apostles* only those who belonged to the closed circle of the Twelve. Paul is extremely free as regards this matter; he is not afraid to define himself as apostle and, even more, he attributes this title also to a woman (Junia). Some early manuscripts, scandalized by his, corrected the female name Junia to the masculine name Junias, trying in this manner to avoid two questions: that a woman be called an apostle and, for some time, Paul's companion in prison.

Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persia (16:12) are remembered for their characteristics. The first two (perhaps twins), due to their work and the other, for her tenderness. Rufus's mother (16:13), whose name is not mentioned, is a kind of adopted mother of Paul. We do not know of his physical mother, but we are certain that he attributed tenderness for her who adopted him as son. The last women mentioned, Julia (perhaps Philologus' wife), Nereus's sister and Olym-pas are mentioned, like other men, without any specific characteristic (16:15).

Hence, eleven women are remembered. Analyzing their names, we discover that among them there were Jews and non-Jews, born free and freed slaves, someone of a high social status and others, not

A text that can make one think is 1Cor 11:2-16, known as the "veil of women". This caused a lot of endless discussions and distortions. Aside from this, Paul gets lost in a strange exegesis of the Rabbinic kind. Towards the end, he proclaims the equality of women and men before God (11:12), but he returns to entangle himself in Rabbinic exegesis (11:13-16).

If, eliminating this cultural conditionings, we wanted to hold what counts really, I think that we ought to give this passage a title more or less like this: "Women prophesying". In fact, this is the great novelty for the women of Corinth; they can prophesy. Examining then the importance that Paul gives to this ministry or charism, one can very well recognize that the principle of Gal 3:28 was respected. What is wrong with this fact is that many are blocked in the cultural conditioning (having to wear the veil in order to prophesy) and one forgets that women could prophesy in the same manner as men. The aberration that still continues till now is this: the woman continues to wear the veil and is impeded from prophesying at the liturgical assembly. What was a cultural conditioning became a rule. What was held highly at the start of Gal 3:28 was abandoned.

In Corinth (and only there) to wear the veil was important for Paul. It was a sign that women could prophesy, without anyone taking them as opportunists or even worse. Paul commands the Corinthians to wear the veil because he wanted to uphold their dignity. Let us remember though, that it is a mere cultural matter. In another context, this norm disappears.

In the same Letter, there is a passage that seems to contradict this. It belongs to the same liturgical context: "*As in all the churches of the holy ones, women should keep silent in the churches, for they are not allowed to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. But if they want to learn anything, they should ask their husbands at home*" (1Cor 14:34-35).

There is no contradiction between one text or the other. We are face to face with the harsh reality of the community of Corinth where, so it seems, the women did not have the same opportunities for *learning* as men. The principle of Gal 3:28 is not applicable because of the concrete mismatch of this community: women were clearly disadvantaged with respect to men as regards "*learning*". Let it be borne in mind that the context is that of celebration and that St. Paul says: if women want to *learn* something, *they should ask the husband at home*. For women's disadvantage, a new space is made (the home) where women, with their husbands' help (culturally better equipped in that city) they recover the dreamed ideal of equality. The home, and not the celebration, becomes the place wherein women are given personalized instruction, so that the inequality should disappear. The celebration continues to be a celebration and not the place of endless questions. So, one can ask: after the instruction at home, shall the women remain silent during celebrations?

We find a similar statement in 1 Timothy. Those who reject this text, with the mere affirmation that it is not Paul's, do not know that even if it were so, the prohibition for talking prevails. Hence, it is better to face it, whether or not it is Paul's writing. The context is equally liturgical. "*A woman must receive instruction silently and under complete control. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. She must be quiet for Adam was formed first then Eve. Further, Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed. But she will be saved through motherhood, provided women persevere in faith and love and holiness, with self-control*" (1Tm 2:11-15). Here, as in 1Cor 14:34-35, it is a matter of *learning*. Aside from the cultural conditionings of this text, it is important to bear in mind that, in the communities entrusted to Timothy, perhaps due to the same mismatch noted in Corinth, instruction was given barely to the men. The women, so it seems, exercised the role of servants, as probably *diakonia* of 3:10 suggests. Hence the principle of Gal 3:28 would be, to some extent, respected in spite of the clear separation of ministries, with instruction, due to circumstances, were attributed only to men.

The text Eph 5:21-33 speaks of the husband-wife relationship. It proclaims absolute equality of the two sexes before God ("*Be subordinate to one another out of reverence to Christ*", 5:21). However, granted that the Letter deals with this

relationship while seeing the Church-Christ relationship, the wife is destined to be subordinate to the husband. This text is ecclesiological correct, because the Church shall always be subordinate to Christ; but culturally conditioned. If he should live during our days, the author of this text would separate the two cases without building the wife-husband relationship on the Church-Christ relationship. The cultural conditioning clouded the principle of Gal 3:28. Nonetheless, the text provides numerous steps forward, especially when it says that the husband's behavior towards his wife must mirror Christ's action in favor of the Church.

In 2Tm 3:6-7 there is a text that unmasks unscrupulous men who take advantage of religion in order to exploit the weak. Doubtless, the text contains an air of disparagement over some women by calling them "women weighed down by sin" and presenting their weaknesses: *"For some of these slip into homes and make captives of women weighed down by sins, led by various desires, always trying to learn but never able to reach a knowledge of the truth"* The context is broad and it also refers to Christian learning. It is culturally conditioned and disparaging with respect to some women who, if they were truly fragile and threatened, ought to receive greater attention from Timothy. The context, however, calls the attention on those who exploit and try to procure their own interests (the men in-charge of teaching). Taking advantage of the fragility of these women, they commit, in the name of religion, greater abuse of power.

The theme "Paul and the Christian women" is much broader than what has been mentioned now (cf. e.g., the organization of the widows in 1Tm 5:3-16 and what is referred to the older women in Titus 2:3-5). Aside from this, Paul mentions other women, as Chloe (1Cor 1:11) and Appia, Philemon's wife (Phil 2). The little that one can see herein seems to prove right the principle established in Gal 3:28. Perhaps, we can still learn from him other things.

10. Egalitarian vision of society

Dear Pauline confrere, one of the major challenges in the reading of Paul alive today is doubtlessly our Father's vision of society in general and, more specifically, of slavery in the context of the Roman empire. Certainly, you must have already heard or read that Paul was indifferent on this cruel situation. You must have also felt that it can anaesthetize us before similar great questions, that afflict humanity, if in case we too were indifferent to the ancient and the new forms of slavery of our time. Hence, it is good that we as ourselves who one can evangelize with this mentality. Let us not forget the character of totality that characterizes the life of our Founder: to give the whole Christ to the whole man. Hence, I think that it is interesting to re-take an egalitarian vision of society present in the writings of our Father, also if in a beginner's form.

Paul and slavery. In spite the fact that he lived in an environment of imperialism based on the force of arms that generate slavery (loss of freedom) and exploitation (loss of property), based on the ideology of the “Pax Romana,” Paul maintained quite highly the primacy of freedom, as he wanted to tell everyone: without freedom the person does not exist, neither the Christian, nor the community, nor Christ. The affirmation of Gal 5:1 is classic: *“For freedom Christ let us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.”*

The statement contains a categorical affirmation, one of the great convictions of Paul, perhaps the greater and the first. Christ’s action in behalf of Christians is essentially an act of liberation. Is it a simple spiritual liberation from sin? Certainly not. Let us not forget that the Galatians, almost all of them, were effectively slaves. They formed a community mainly of enslaved persons, and what counts most, they were greatly desired in slave markets spread in the great cities of the empire. A Galatian slave was costing much more than others: he was a “first-rate merchandise.”

Paul draws the consequences of this affirmation by ordering that they be not subject “once more” to the yoke of slavery. Eventually, he shows what is his principal preoccupation, that is, the problem of the Jewish Christians, who, with the imposition of the Law and of circumcision, enslaved once more those who were freed in Christ and through Christ. Christ’s action has freed us for good, but persons can once more go back to being enslaved again. And whatever form of slavery threatens Christ’s fundamental action in behalf of persons.

In the same Letter to the Galatians, we find an important conviction of Paul, already underlined: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal 3:28). Probably, this is a baptismal formula used in Paul’s communities. He categorically affirms the elimination of all inequalities, in order to show clearly the results of the freedom obtained by Jesus Christ. We become only one with him, while letting disappear differences caused by race (difference between Jew and Greek, the traditional criterion of the Jews to separate humanity into two blocs; differences of social class disappear (slave and free man, the two forms of dividing humanity socially), the differences due to sex (man and woman) disappear. Let us take note that as far as slavery is concerned, it is not possible to “spiritualize” the issue, as if we could say it has to do with spiritual liberation from sin, etc., because in this case we ought to ask who should be those who are “free”.

If this norm were in fact born of the baptismal catechesis of Paul and of his dreams of freedom, it is interesting to see what we do, what we say and what we want, when we come to think of the baptism of the future Christians. What life program do we proclaim? What kind of catechesis do we introduce? What sort of conviction do we nurture? All this makes us believe that Paul sowed in the heart of persons (adults, evidently) and of communities a liberating ideal destined to bear fruits.

So the question rises: Why was this not immediately concretized? Probably, because there was an abyss between conscience (conviction of the primacy of freedom) and the practices concretized by slavery. Paul, while he did not have the power against the monster of slavery, sowed dreams of liberation and of freedom in Christ. And this is what we, going over his Letters, can see. Concretely, many times Paul met with Christian slaves of non-Christian masters. It seems the case of the exhortations of Eph 6:5-9 and Col 3:22-4,1 (the same thing happens in 1Tm 6:1-2). In the impossibility of abolishing the social system of slavery, the Apostle introduces two principles that ought to support the relationships between masters and slaves: mutual respect (an obedient slave and a master who abandons threats) and a single lordship for both: that of Jesus Christ, who does not make distinctions of persons. Obeying, the slave does not make any distinction, as if he obeys Christ; and the master, setting aside threats, approaches the deeds of the Lord who does not make distinction of persons (evidently, the advantage continues to be of the master, but the differences at least are shortened): *“Slaves, be obedient to your human masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not only when being watched, as currying favor but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, willingly serving the Lord and not human beings, knowing that each will be requited from the Lord for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. Masters, act in the same way toward them, and stop bullying, knowing that both they and you have a Master in heaven and that with him there is no partiality”* (Eph 6:5-9).

It can seem little, but certainly it was a thorn in the flesh of pitiless masters. Paul began to break the spinal column of slavery, on which the economy of the Roman Empire stood.

Paul’s discourse becomes more incisive when he knows closely the situation of the communities and of the persons to whom he writes. It is the case of the first Letter to the Corinthians and that to Philemon.

In 1Cor 12:13 we find, abbreviated, the formula of Gal 3:28. *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free person, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit”* Knowing well the community he founded (the slaves of Corinth comprised two thirds of the population), he has the opportunity of stimulating the slaves to conquer freedom: *“Were you a slave when you were called? Do not be concerned but, even if you can gain your freedom, make the most of it. For the slave called in the Lord is a freed person in the Lord, just as the free person who has been called is a slave of Christ. You have been purchased at a price. Do not become slaves to human beings”* (1Cor 7:21-23). This is the clearest instruction that Paul addresses to the slaves. The *redemption* of Christ (a technical word that designated the buying of slaves in the markets) is final and irrevocable.

How the slaves managed to become effectively free, we do not know. In the Letter to the Romans (12:8) mention is made of someone who “presides” (*proistamenos*) over the community. Perhaps this role refers to Christian en-

dowed with a certain power of acquisition, who “bought” slaves in order to set them free (cf. Ti 3:8,14).

Even more significant, however, is the Letter to Philemon. It is a text addressed to a master Philemon because of the slave Onesimus. Paul has become his “father” when he gave birth to him in the prison, that is, by baptizing him. In the Letter he asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus no longer as slave, but as *brother*. Onesimus (a name that means *useful*), as slave he was *useless*. As a brother and free Christian it would be extremely useful for Philemon. Paul could give orders on this matter. He, however, preferred to ask out of love. Love has its own laws, much stronger than the cold and exterior codes. The love of Paul as well as that of Philemon and Onesimus has given consistency to the Apostles conviction: “... *there is neither slave nor free person*” (Gal 3:28; 1Cor 12:13).

Working with the communities, Paul began to dismantle the mechanism of slavery. He could give orders to Philemon, but he believes more in the strength of love than in that of decrees.

Some can think that this is little, but it is a good start. It remains to be seen in the Christian communities of today whether the new forms of slavery have been abolished, or if we orient ourselves with the criterion of “usefulness” or of “uselessness” of the neo-liberal market which considers persons as things. What is the repercussion of this reality among us, who must be St. Paul alive today?

Paul and the poor. This topic is quite broad, but here I will limit myself to some indications, adequate, as I see them, in order to alert our conscience and solidarity face to face with the two-thirds of humanity which suffer hunger, hunger that makes everyone equal, regardless of race, religion, etc.

Paul’s preoccupation for the poor of Jerusalem seems to have been permanent since the start of his activities as evangelizer. If this were so, he seems to tell us that we cannot separate evangelization and the concern to feed the hungry. It is as if he wants to affirm that evangelization will not be complete unless hunger is eliminated from the face of the earth. With a step ahead, we could affirm that the distribution of wealth that guarantees life is in itself a Eucharistic gesture or, at least, it leads us to the door of the Eucharist.

In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of this constant concern since the start of his apostolic activity. He refers to a meeting with Peter, James and John in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9). Perhaps this meeting took place immediately after Paul’s “conversion” or, at least, it could be what is usually called the “Council of Jerusalem (narrated in Acts 15 and approximately dated in the year 49). In Paul’s version, the Apostles Peter, James and John asked: “*Only, we were to be mindful of the poor, which is the very thing I was eager to do*” (Gal 2:10).

The Letter to the Galatians must have been written between the years 53 and 55, and in the cited text Paul confesses not to have given up this concern, a sign that he has not separated evangelization from social promotion, expressed in the collection for the poor.

In 1Cor 16:1-2 Paul orders that the collection should go ahead according to the indications given to the communities of Galatia (the Letter to the Galatians does not contain these indications).

The more interesting texts for the development of this theme are found 2Cor 8-9 (perhaps Chapter 9, as was said earlier, is a circular letter addressed to the communities of Achaia). Aside from Achaia, these two chapters inform that also Macedonia participates in the general collection of the aids against misery and hunger, in spite of the fact that its communities, especially Philippi and Thessalonica, were extremely poor (cf. 2Cor 8:2). In this way, we have Paul as an organizer of an international and intercontinental campaign (Macedonia and Achaia are in Europe; Galatia is in Asia) and this for the sake of the poor Christians of Jerusalem (ancient Middle East). For this reason, Paul ran serious risks (cf. Rom 15:25ff, especially v. 31; Acts 20:3). It is interesting to ask ourselves as well why Luke is silent as regards this collection (cf. Acts 21:17-26), remembering it only in passing (cf. Acts 24:17).

Finally, dear Pauline confrere, to complete the memorial of our Father as regards "Paul and the poor", let it not be forgotten that, in contact with the communities of Corinth, knowing that the majority of them is made up of poor people, (1Cor 1:26), Paul presents himself as one who works with his own hands (Acts 18:1-4; 1Cor 4:12) and never does he accept to mix evangelization and money, freely proclaiming the Lord Jesus (1Cor 9; 2Cor 10-13). Does all this, we may ask, have some importance to us?

CONCLUSION

Finally, dear Pauline confrere, I am at the end of what I consider to be the draft of a "memorial to Paul". You shall have noticed that our challenge has not been that of doing the exegesis of our Father's texts (so many competent exegists have already done so), but to be brave and creative in hermeneutics, audacious and enlightened in finding out where the steps of Paul would have led us if he should come to earth anew. Our great difficulty consists in making a qualitative hermeneutical step. In order to do this, it is necessary that we had the courage, as needed, of shedding off us a heavy leaden mantle which we can call "tradition". If it were not us to do this hermeneutical step, others would hardly do it for us. And, let us admit it, on it depends our survival as Congregation. Hence, time is up for us to roll ours sleeves and get ourselves to work.

The points touched on above could be multiplied by two or three. Nonetheless, I do not believe that it is more interesting to have them before us at the same time. It is urgent that we wake up to a new presence of Paul in this post-modern world and to be brave in going on ahead. And so, as the Founder liked to say, God shall light lamps as we move ahead. It is time that we forget what is behind us and go forward to what lies ahead (Phil 3:13), without losing our vo-

cation as pioneers. *“... yet our hope is that, as your faith increases, our influence among you may be greatly enlarged, within our proper limits, so that we may preach the gospel beyond you, not boasting of work already done in another’s sphere. (2Cor 10:15b-16).*

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