



International Meeting of the Coordinators of Formation and Vocation Promotion of the Society of Saint Paul

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DOCUMENTS OF THE CONGREGATION ON FORMATION AND VOCATION PROMOTION

Br. Giuseppe Galli

As a premise or introduction to the brief presentation of the formative texts of the Congregation, I would like to use an evangelical image which has been the source of inspiration in the work and effort of those confreres who have prepared them: that is to be “new wine in new skins”. We are all here to know, to learn, on this occasion of formation, to become “new skins for the new wine” of the young of our time. The question that we always have before us is: For which Pauline religious life do we form? Therefore, we leave aside the cultural approach and try to get close to these documents which our Congregation has produced in time: and, perhaps, if it seems to us that the responses were of a particular date, the questions, instead are always actual.

The Constitutions and the Directory of the Society of Saint Paul (April 4, 1984).

The Constitutions, approved by the Holy See on the centenary of the birth of Don Alberione, is the first text to which every Coordinator should refer, not only because of the seal of authority of the Church, but, in a particular way, because it happily fuses or unites the charism of the Founder and the Magisterium or teaching of the Church, which besides recommits it to us as a Rule of Life and of apostolate for the mission, expressing lines of orientation for vocation promotion and for the formation of every member. The actual text is the end of a long and suffered evolution “placed in action by Vatican Council II through the Special General Chapter 1969-1971”.

After the chapters on our identity in the Church of Christ and on Pauline apostolic life a wide and complete consideration is opened on Pauline formation which includes:

- Vocation promotion: community and personal responsibility of every member;
- Integral formation: characteristics, inspirational principle and its human, spiritual, intellectual and apostolic dimensions.
- The stages of formation: Postulancy, Novitiate, Juniorate.
- Permanent Formation. Importance and task of every Circumscription, besides the duty of every member.

Service of Authority in the Society of St. Paul – Manual (1996)

It is in response to an operative guideline of the VI General Chapter celebrated in 1992. In the following year some members began to use the draft of this document and soon the complexity of the text was noted. After consulting the canonists and other existing normatives of other religious, a new edition, enriched by the suggestions of the general Government and of the Major Superiors of circumscriptions, came to be approved as a document 'ad experimentum' during the Interchapter in 1995. The Handbook of Authority, presenting it as a collection of juridical norms and practical suggestions, is an application of the Constitutions in the exercise of authority. It has a normative value and has an established finality to help the superiors and those responsible at all levels to fulfil their own responsibilities within specific areas, terms and competencies. With regard to the vocation / formation sector it is a great

help, clear and practical reflections on authority in the beginning and t in the last paragraphs and appendix. In these we see the reasons for the necessity and urgency for a delegated structure for the formation in the circumscriptions similar to that of the apostolate. In particular it presents the future of the Coordinator General with his competencies, term duration, area of competency and at the end the physonomy of the team that accompany it. Let us not forget the appendix No. 3 which offers the points for a report on the candidate for Perpetual Profession and Sacred Orders as we have appendix No. 4 with regard to the annual reports on the circumscriptions.

Chapter Documents (Special General Chapter 1969-1971)

In Ariccia, the Congregation convoked a Special General Chapter which “had the task of assimilating the Council and of instilling doctrine and norms in the charismatic patrimony as well as in the practice of the Congregation: a “true and proper project of reformation”. It had a long time of preparation of two sessions, with an interval of almost one year (1969-1971) during which all the communities were asked and involved in the search and in the suggestions. Don Alberione, who was still living, blessed the effort and fatigue which the Congregation was living and understood very well its importance. And also since the sons of the beginning of the Congregation were still living, they were not only faithful interpreters and interlocutors of the intuitions of Don Alberione, but also the first protagonists of his apostolic zeal. The documents of the Special General Chapter marked for the Congregation the attainment of mature age: those documents maintain a living and immediate charismatic richness, and above all, offer a systematic and profound vision of the Charism, from which, successively, in a continuous way, we have always drawn. In the chapter on Formation, this has been confirmed, a true and actual treasure which still remains unexplored, the schematic system with the specific reflections were practically concentrated and synthesized in the third part of the Constitutions: Vocation Promotion (see practical applications nn. 577-583); integral formation (see general Principles nn. 528-576); Stages of formation (see practical applications nn. 584-622).

Ratio Formationis

On February 2, 1990, the Church, through the Dicastery of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life, issued the document “Potissimum institutioni” [Directives on formation in Religious Institutes], with which, in the light of the numerous experiences and Post-Conciliar research, indicated suggestions and solutions to the numerous problems of formation which had arisen and invited every religious institution to draw up a “*Plan of formation*” (*Ratio Formationis*). The V General Chapter of the Society of Saint Paul (1986) had already considered this requirement and, in that context, had entrusted the Government of the Congregation the task to write a text, which was approved three years later by the Inter-Chapter Assembly (Sao Paulo, 1989), and thus, it became normative. The principal source of inspiration of the *Ratio formations* is the work of the Founder “The Apostolate of the Edition”, the fundamental concept of which could be summarized as follows: “the mission and the horizon of our formation”. The purpose of the *Ratio* consists in providing help and in being a guide in the *formation of the Paulines: initial, specific and on-going or permanent*, and is addressed to all the Pauline: formandi, Formators and professed members. It contains three chapters: in the first one, it treats of the Pauline charism, following the first part of the Constitutions; in the 2nd, more developed, it traces the fundamental lines of Pauline Formation, presenting the formative action of the person in view of the mission in the light of the evangelical and Pauline ideals of Don Alberione; the 3rd one, this chapter applies the general principles already mentioned to the diverse stages of Pauline formation. Therefore, the *Ratio formationis* provides the general framework for each Circumscription to be able to elaborate or draw up its own “*formative ‘Iter’*”, so as to *understand and value the cultural characteristics proper to it*.

This is fully according to the reports of these days: the Pauline integral formation oriented to the mission.

Pauline Formation for Mission

Minutes of the International Seminar on Pauline formation (Ariccia, 12-13 October 1994)

It is important to draw up or write a chronicle of everything that preceded this Seminar in order to understand its importance and how actual it still is. There were three reasons which moved the Chapter of 1992 to entrust to the successive General Government the commitment to organize a Seminar of Study on Pauline Formation: the awareness of so many exodus which took place in every stage which preceded perpetual profession; the lack of preparation and the fragility for insertion in the mission, not only under the professional aspect but, above all, in the motivations and availability; the growing (self) marginalization of many “elderly” of the apostolic world which was facing a strong technical and organizational evolution. A preparatory commission was set up for this purpose, which worked very well and for a long time in the preparation of the Congress. How? A questionnaire was drawn up and was sent to all the members, including the Novices; the responses were analyzed, elaborated and read interpreting them; in addition three speakers were invited to develop some themes, and their reports were sent to all the participants of the Seminar before it began. In its development, the Seminar concentrated on the work of the groups, which made a deep and extensive reflection on every aspect of formation. In this work the groups found what was missing in the origin for the lack of perseverance, for the lack of preparation for the mission and for the marginalization; and, above all, those elements (method, and contents) became evident, which make our formative action capable of preparing Paulines who are truly ready to live their own consecration in fidelity and to carry out their own mission generously. The seriousness and the importance which was attributed to the Seminar are shown by the criteria assumed for the choice of participants. No one was elected from the grass-root level, neither did they elect exclusively those assigned to this work, vocation promotion and Formators; but those called to participate were all the confreres with charges of responsibility such as major Superiors, Coordinators of vocation promotion and of formation, General Directors of the Apostolate. There was a serene, fraternal debate and far-reaching confrontation which resulted in a final document, which until now – as we have already said – is very actual in the framework of the charismatic reference, in which the mission is the reason for being of the entire Congregation, as well as for the operational basis in which the mission, being at the center, qualifies and models every formative stage.

Cards for reflection on the identity of the Pauline in the two-fold expression *priest-disciple*.

A recommendation of the VII General Chapter (1998) asked “the General Government to organize a Seminar on the Pauline vocation in its two-fold expression *Priest-Disciple*”. Even understanding the importance of the theme, the Inter-Chapter Assembly of New Delhi judged too narrow the time of preparation and suggested to use a different and simpler modality. Then the General Government decided to invite every member of the Congregation to give his opinion on the theme and set up a working group which in two sessions succeeded in producing the actual cards.

The *choice* and the peculiarity of the card already indicate its particular purpose: to be an “*instrument for work*”, open and not definitive, thought out precisely for the study and personal or community discussion. The terms are very accessible, stimulating, and want to favour “a dynamic and integral fidelity of all the Paulines”, to those four requirements which the Church has left as a consignment to the religious (Congregation for Religious Life 1980): fidelity to man of our time; fidelity to Christ, to his Gospel; fidelity to the Church and to its mission; fidelity to the Charism of the Institute.

Identity (religious profession) and two-fold expression (priest-disciple) are the two key concepts with which a profound transformation of perspective can be realized. In what is common to the Pauline, the priest and the disciple live in union and reciprocity of gifts in view of the common mission: “consecration is the true source of our Pauline identity”. Our specific and common identity resides in the call to sanctification and evangelization of today’s world by our witness of life and the preaching in the world of communication.

Compendium of the principal teachings of the Founder concerning the theme of vocation

This text was written during the Vocational Year (April 4, 2005 – April 4, 2006), proclaimed by Don Silvio Sassi, the Superior General, following the explicit request of the VIII General Chapter: “... so that all the members of the Congregation be sensitized concerning the grave vocational problem ...” The task of the writing was assigned to the Pauline Center of Spirituality, which immediately set to work searching the texts of the Founder, especially those addressed to the Society of Saint Paul. The result was such an abundance of interventions, and therefore, it was necessary to make a careful selection of the material. The theme of vocations was always present in Don Alberione as sensibility and as operational interest: “the works of God are made with men of God”.

The material selected by the internal bulletin “San Paolo”, from “Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae” and from “Ut perfectus sit homo Dei” was organized in 4 chapters which we briefly summarize as follows:

1. Don Alberione presents himself as “vocacionist” through the witnesses of some confreres of the first times (Don Armani, Don Costa...).
2. It is a successful synthesis of the principal teachings which the Founder offered during his life “on the theme of vocation”. These are convictions and practical indications which refer to the origin of the vocation, the beauty and the “novelty” of the Pauline vocation, the characteristics, the criteria of evaluation, the subjects, the means, and the role of the communities.
3. Through numerous quotations of his “taccuini” – note books – the vocational awareness with which Don Alberione lived his own mission; awareness which he wants his sons to keep alive always, thus creating a vocational pedagogy for all the members.
4. Like our Founder always listened to the word of the Church, in this chapter are compared the most important parts of two ecclesial documents (Vita consecrata, New vocations for a new Europe) with some texts of the Founder. Some points for reflection result from this and the practical application which challenge us very much.

Orientations concerning vocation Promotion

At the end of the Vocational Year 2005-2006, there was the last subsidy in order of time. It is a question of some indications, which the General Government wanted to give at the opportune moment after the analysis of the vocational material gathered and sent by the Circumscriptions during the year.

The text subdivided into 15 points, recalls the happy synthesis, the responsibility of all in view of vocation promotion and formation; the duty to propose the Pauline vocation in all its integrity and with a profound ecclesial sense; to go to what is essential, proposing to the young people the fascinating person of Jesus and the Pauline “Saints” who are the heroic witnesses; to qualify the vocational subsidies with the “Pauline color” which should distinguish us and which demands clarity of contents and competence in communication. The “orientations” are given as a sort of memorandum directed principally to those “engaged in this work”, but to be meditated by all the Paulines.