

CELEBRATE THE CENTENARY: RELAUNCHING THE MISSION

The present file intends to present some strong points for the relaunching of our mission: a renewed awareness – in light of the Apostle Paul – to be missionaries for the men of today; the need to put ourselves in the digital world and therefore to redesign the Pauline apostolate.

While we acknowledge that we are “incapable and insufficient in everything,” we feel the need to entrust ourselves to the powerful intercession of Mary, Queen of the Apostles, of Saint Paul the Apostle and of the Pauline Family in Heaven.

The Centenary, an occasion not to be missed

The celebration of the Centenary of foundation of our Congregation spurs us to the relaunching of our mission. It's an impossible undertaking if we rely only on our forces. But because it's a matter of a reality that began “from on High,” it is necessary to revive in us the “grace” of our origins due to the passage of the Spirit.

We place ourselves, therefore, in a mode of listening to the Spirit which invites us to “recall” the abundant riches of grace he lavished on us. “Recalling” in our case means making strong the certainty that the riches of our origins have not disappeared and that they continue to give consistency to what we are and to what we are called to do in the Church and for the world. Also being directed to us is the exhortation addressed by the Apostle to his faithful disciple Timothy: “...I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is in you through the imposition of my hands” (2Tim 1,6). Through these words, Timothy, placed as head of a difficult, weary and motivation-deprived ecclesial reality, is invited to revive it, that is, repossess the energy of the Spirit he received through the imposition of the hands. On the “gift” of the charism placed by the Spirit in the heart of our Founder and recognized and authenticated by the Church, our Congregation can and must count and walk through all the ways made today practicable by technological progress in the area of communication, to announce the only Word that saves.

Saint Paul, inspirer of the Pauline mission in the world of today

At the origin of the apostolic undertaking of the Paulines there is the link with Saint Paul (cf *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae*, 2). Consequently, the celebration of the Centenary becomes a propitious occasion to recover the depth of the thought of Fr. Alberione regarding Saint Paul and his being the protagonist in the founding of our Institute, so as to systematically approach the Apostle in the exercise of his activity and in his writings, and to assume his spirit and see in him the model of our apostolic spirituality which is our life entirely consecrated to the mission. In fact, the life of the Apostle handed over without any reservation to Christ, his zeal for the cause of the Gospel, like his Letters, is for us Paulines “a school.” Perfectly at ease in the most disparate cultural and religious environments of his time, the Apostle teaches us to identify the most efficacious and fast instruments and techniques for communication among men, making use of them for a single purpose: evangelization. It is enough to consider how he has captured the importance and effectiveness of the literary genre of the *epistle*; how he has appreciated the effectiveness of rhetoric and the techniques of argumentation applied to evangelization.

Thus what the Vatican Council II had said for all the faithful becomes for us today a special program of apostolate: live in very close union with the men of our time; penetrate perfectly their manner of thinking and feeling, as it is expressed through their culture; harmonize the knowledge of the new sciences, of the new doctrines and of the most recent discoveries with Christian thought and morals, so that the religious sense and honesty may proceed at the same step with scientific knowledge and with the continuing progress of technology; thus judge and interpret all things with an integral Christian sense (cf Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 62).

All of that is not a novelty for the Pauline. Nos. 64-65 and 87 of our charismatic history *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae* are the actualization of the thought of Saint Paul made by Fr. Alberione. **Both – Saint Paul and Fr. Alberione – ask us to provide for an adequate formation for the apostolate that includes professional, humanistic and theological preparation and an appropriate and updated knowledge of the sciences of communication and of the various languages of media.** To look at the Apostle as the inspirer and model of our mission means, in synthesis, to have a clear awareness that **our institute is a teaching institute and that everything that we are and what we have to do has for its immediate end the apostolate** (cf *UPS*, II, 172), or the salvation of

souls through the preaching of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, and him as the way, the truth and the life.

The digital: way of the Pauline apostolate “today”

Coherently with what has just been said, it is easy to understand how urgent is our apostolic presence in the digital and internet world. To be able to give value to the “means that allow us a capability of expression that is almost unlimited” and that “open notable prospects and realizations to the Pauline exhortation: “Woe to me if I don’t announce the gospel” (Benedict XVI, Message on the 44th World Day of Communications, 2010: *Il sacerdote e la pastorale nel mondo digitale: i nuovi media al servizio della Parola*).

The same claim of the internet to be considered as an “environment,” and not as a “means”; as a “real place,” and not as a “virtual place,” puts before us a series of challenges. Our “being there,” in this agorà that involves an ever increasing number of men and women, our contemporaries, who look for connections, links, friendships, not a neutral “being there,” but as apostles. In many countries, the daily experience is today ever more mediatized, ever more “immersive”: one is continually subjected, in spite of ourselves, to a continuous, incessant and widespread “torrent” of sensory stimuli.

But the web, a place wherein we must “be there,” also asks that we “be with.” Our full presence requires participation and sharing, or entering “into a relation.” The challenge is therefore a presence not as an “impoverished form,” but as an “augmented form”: this is our apostolic area, characterized by authentic relations among persons. Fr. Alberione would say: a “being there,” but as Paulines, or as “*men and women religious*” (cf *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae*, 23-24).

A stimulating provocation is also launched to us by Pope Francis. “Today, when the web and the instruments of human communication have reached unheard of developments, we feel the challenge of discovering and transmitting the “mystique” of living together, of mingling, of meeting one another, of taking each other’s arms, of supporting one another, of participating in this rather chaotic sea that can transform itself into a true experience of fraternity, into a solidarity caravan, a holy pilgrimage. In this way, the greater possibilities of communication will be translated into greater possibilities of encounter and solidarity among all. If we could follow this road, it would be something very good, very health restoring, very liberating, very generative of hope!” (*Evangelii*

gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation on the Announcement of the Gospel in Today's World, n. 87).

Redesigning the Pauline apostolate in today's time

Precisely because she is immersed in "this" time, our Congregation is urged to re-think and re-design its manner of conceiving and realizing the apostolate. And she does it in light of a priority act of awareness: the unescapable urgency of restoring to all Paulines their inborn right to exercise the apostolate to which they have been called. Because of this it is necessary to give new vigor to the traditional apostolates like the Bookstore, Editorship in its various components: books, periodicals, audiovisuals, the social nets and what the human mind will have known to come up with. Without ignoring the economic phase that we are living. It seems wise that we move through a double line of action: maintaining the traditional forms of our apostolate, doing selected and targeted choices, and opening ourselves with shrewd decision to new opportunities of evangelization represented by the digital. It is a choice already partially put in the field in some countries and allows us to reach more easily other types of "readers." Fidelity to our missionary charism asks us, in short, to start experimenting new modalities of apostolic action on the web, on social networks and on various platforms of the internet so that the Word may be announced "to the extreme limits of the earth." The digital is actually the most risky apostolic department. It is necessary therefore to invest with prudence, but also with creativity and trust, as fidelity to the dynamism proper of our charism asks this of us. On the steps of Fr. Alberione, realizing a change from apostles of the "good press" to apostles of the "good digital."

In obedience to our charismatic gift, it is necessary to mobilize the creative and technological human resources at the service of the Gospel, in an effort of preparation and sensitization to surpass a tested and reassuring apostolic model. We note the need to learn the language proper of the new digital environment. This will be the specific apostolic formation of every Pauline.

In our Communities, sometimes frightened by the failure of the apostolate up to the moment practiced, the space of formation and updating ought to be guaranteed. Without fears and prejudices, it should be possible to involve the Brothers in the formation of a flexible mentality; to help them to repossess what we are by vocation, aware that the Pauline charism does not "grow old" and therefore ready to stay on the frontlines of contemporaneity so that Jesus the Master may continue to be preached to all and in all ways.