



SAN PAOLO

OFFICIAL HOUSE BULLETIN OF THE SOCIETY OF ST PAUL

“For me to live is Christ”

Letter of the Superior general

Year 81 – No. 420 – January 2006

LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

“For me to live is Christ”

Dear Brothers,

To follow, also for the year 2006, the *operative guideline 1.1.1.* of the VIII General Chapter, I entrust to your meditation the letter to the Philippians of our Father Saint Paul.

The editorial elaboration includes a presentation of historico-critical character that takes into account the most recent biblical studies on the letter to the Philippians, inserted with the proposal of some questions for a personal and communitarian assimilation starting from various aspects that characterize our life. Reference to the reading and use that blessed James Alberione did of the letter follows. The last part, starting from some passages of the letter, realizes an interpretation that takes into account the social, ecclesial, communication and Congregational context in which we live today. The title ***For me to live is Christ*** is taken from 1:21 of the letter itself.

The text prepared has been expressly desired as a complex of runs of a praying reflection that intends to stimulate the interest of every Pauline and of each one in the communities of our Circumscriptions, for a deepening that may be realized with the contribution of all. If the fruit of the overall meditation of everybody shall meet in a telematic *forum* of our site, I believe that such could be a good example of a “collective thought” on our father and model Saint Paul, necessary for the dynamism of our Congregation to “strain forward.”

The example and the words of the Primo Maestro stimulate us in this work of continuous spiritual growth: “All the souls that enjoyed reading St. Paul became robust souls. Whoever reads St. Paul and familiarizes himself with him, comes to possess little by little a spirit similar to his” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1934-1939*, p. 315).

THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

During the audience of October 1, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI exhorted us: "Yours is an avantgarde apostolate in a field that is vast and complex, that offers many opportunities and, at the same time, not a few problems (...). May each one of you make his own the spirit and the style that distinguished the Apostle of the gentiles, making actual even in this our post-modern era his missionary work."

Rome, 25 January 2006
Conversion of St. Paul

Fr. Silvio Sassi
Superior General

I. INTRODUCTION

As we have done for the First Letter to the Thessalonians, before going into the study and deepening of the Letter to the Philippians, we shall try to know in brief the history of the city of Philippi, according to the perspective of which Luke narrates the arrival of Paul and the founding of the communities and even information about the letter itself.

1. The city

During the time of Paul, Philippi was the principal city of a region of the Roman province of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). It was situated at a distance of 13 kms. from the Aegean sea, in the gulf of Naples. Through it passed the *Via Egnatia*, the principal Roman road that united the capital of the empire to Byzantium (Constantinople). Archeology has discovered ancient monuments and constructions of the city: the forum, temples, baths, a library, a cemetery, aqueducts, fountains, porticoes and residential quarters.

Philippi was situated in a valley surrounded by mountains. On one of them, towards the east, in the massif of Orbelos, was the acropolis. To the north it borders on the Balkan plateaus, to the south with mount Symbolon, to the west with Pangaion. Before being called Philippi, it was called *Krenides*, perhaps because of its abundant fountains and wells. In 356 B.C. Philip II, king of Macedonia (359-336), transferred to this region many migrants, widened the city and called it Philippi. It was he who built the walls, the theater and the acropolis of the city.

In 167 B.C. the Roman consul Lucius Emilius Paulus divided Macedonia into four regions: Philippi became the principal city of his region (Acts 16:12). The city calls to mind important his-

torical facts, like the battle which bears its name by which in the year 42 B.C. Brutus and Cassius were defeated by Anthony and Octavian. Later, Anthony installed there many former Roman fighters and Quintus Pacius Rufus transformed Philippi into a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), changing its name into Colonia Victrix Philippensium. To say that Philippi was a Roman colony meant to affirm that it was administered according to the politics of the Romans (cf. Acts 16:19,35,38 - magistrates, strategists and lictors; Phil 1:1 - bishops and deacons).

In the year 30 B.C. Octavian deprived of their property many Romans who had fought against him and had favored Anthony, and transferred them to Philippi, changing the name of the city into Colonia Julia Philippensis. Three years after (27 B.C.), the Roman Senate conferred on Octavian the title of Augustus (this was the start of what later will be called the “cult of the emperor”), a fact that also affected the name of the city, called from then on Colonia Augusta Julia Philippensis.

According to the standards of the time, Philippi ought to be a medium-sized city. Its population, as we can imagine, is multi-ethnic and multicultural: there you can find the natives (Thracians), the Greeks brought by Philip II, the Romans transferred by Anthony and Octavian, and persons coming from other regions (Lydia came from Thyatira, in Asia Minor), as can be gathered starting from the religious universe of the city. In fact, it is a small pantheon: the Thracian gods (the god Liber Pater = Bacchus?, the goddess Bendis), the Greek goddess Athena, the Roman gods Jupiter and Mars, the cult of the emperor, the goddess Cybele (of Anatolia) and the Egyptian divinities Isis, Serapis and Arpocrates.

We have sparse information about the economy and society of Philippi. Mentioning “Roman colony”, residence of former fighters – supported by the empire – and of their descendants, gives a vague idea of how the life of the city could be. The residential quarters discovered by archeology make us think of a part of the population that is well-to-do, different from that of Corinth where there are no traces of houses, a sign of a very poor population.

Exercising a little caution, we follow Luke and his description of the life of the city. We find out that Lydia lived there. She is identified as a “*dealer of purple, of the city of Thyatira*” (Acts 16:14). She is an “*adorer of God*” – a pagan who accepts the one God of Judaism, but does not follow in detail the religion of the Jews. Lydia sells dyes, purple, an expensive color extracted from a mollusk. The clothes of the poor at that time were all of the same color. To wear purple clothes indicated a certain social position. Lydia and her customers, therefore, were not poor. Also, the fact of hosting in her home the group of Paul (Silas, Timothy and perhaps Luke) shows that she is the owner of a big house (the houses of the poor consisted of a single locale). The jailer of Philippi had less property than Lydia and everything leads us to think that her house was on top of the prison where Paul and Silas had been thrown (Acts 16:34).

Luke tells of an exorcism done by Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:16-18). He frees a young woman from a double slavery: she is possessed by a spirit of divination (a kind of demonic possession, in Luke’s perspective) and she is economically exploited by unscrupulous masters who enrich themselves at her expense.

2. The founding of the community in Luke’s perspective

The arrival of Paul and of his companions in the city of Philippi is extremely important in the view of Luke, who has organized in his own way the voyages of Paul, building his narration around at least four common elements. At every voyage, Paul *preaches* (makes a discourse), works a *miracle*, suffers *tribulation* and faces an episode of *magic/superstition*. Every voyage includes these elements, without a predetermined order. Furthermore, Luke attributes to every voyage something peculiar.

We are in the thereabouts of the year 50, during the second voyage of Paul (Acts 15:39–18:22). We note in Luke the concern to show at once the invitation addressed to Paul by a Macedonian (Acts 16:9-10). Luke is in a hurry. He wants Paul to be in

Troas. Because of this he summarizes in a few words Paul's visit to the communities founded during the first voyage (Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia). He practically ignores the passing of Paul through Galatia. The motive is clear: with Paul's arrival in Philippi, the Gospel starts its entrance into the European continent. And for Luke this is the great *peculiarity* of the second voyage. He even ignores an important historical date: at this point, Rome has already received the announcement of Jesus Christ. (The expulsion of the Jews – and of the Christians Aquila and Priscilla – from the city of Rome by order of Claudius, had taken place in the year 41). For the author of the Acts, as soon as Paul's feet touch Macedonia, that's the time the Gospel reaches Europe. That moment is extremely important and time will prove that Luke is right. If not for the pioneering quality of Paul, the Jesus movement (there is no talk yet of Christianity) would end up suffocated in Palestine and in Asia Minor. With that, we understand the change of direction described in Acts 16:7. It is the Spirit that leads the mission. It is he who opens ways, going beyond frontiers.

Luke describes extensively the stay of Paul and his companions in Philippi and the surrounding area (note that they are three or four, but only Paul and Silas go to prison. Timothy – and perhaps Luke – might be in another city not mentioned in the Acts). He pays more attention to the founding of the communities of Philippi (16:11-40) than to those of Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia, or of the great metropolis and capital of Achaia, Corinth (18:1-17). The motive seems evident.

We were saying that Luke schematized the voyages of Paul around four elements: Three of them take place in Philippi: the *showdown with magic*, the *miracle* (Paul exorcises a young woman possessed by a spirit of divination) and *tribulation* (Paul and Silas are scourged and put in prison). Exorcism makes us think of the custom of Jesus and scourging sends us back to the words of Jesus (cf. Lk 12:11; 21:12-13).

The liberation of the Apostles is described in an epic manner using the image of a theophany: the earthquake. If we stick to

the letter of the text we will not be able to explain some questions. **1.** The text makes us understand that the earthquake took place only in the prison, something unlikely. **2.** If the earthquake has shaken the foundation of the prison, how come nobody got wounded? **3.** How can you explain that an earthquake of such intensity opens wide the doors of the prison and loosens the chains of all the prisoners? **4.** How come nobody of the prisoners escaped? **5.** If the house of the jailer was built above the prison, how come it was not damaged? **6.** The jailer brings Paul and Silas to his house, washes their wounds, offers them supper, is baptized with his whole family and when in the morning the authorities order that the two be released, the text hints that Paul and Silas are still under arrest. How can this fact be explained? **7.** Why does Paul reveal himself as a Roman citizen only after having been beaten and spent the night in prison?

What really happened? Luke took into consideration a fact in its pure state and worked on it, giving it an edifying narration. The fact in its pure state is narrated by Paul: "*You know that we have suffered and have been insulted in Philippi. We have decided, however, trusting in our God, to announce to you the Gospel of God in the midst of great struggles*" (1Thes 2:2). The edifying description is the work of Luke. Narrating this episode about thirty-five years later, he includes it among the great interventions of God who liberates (in the same class as the many episodes in the Old Testament) and in the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit who leads the mission in the midst of conflicts. The Gospel enters Europe. The one who guides the mission is the Spirit. Nothing and nobody can resist his action until the testimony of Jesus Christ reaches the farthest limits of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). We can glimpse points of contact between the entrance of the Gospel in Europe and the entrance of the Hebrews in the Promised Land (the book of Joshua).

Everything leads us to believe that there is no synagogue in Philippi. If there were, these women – among whom Lydia, the adorer of God – would have gone to pray in it and not on the

bank of the river. The fact that there is no synagogue is providential, a challenge that providence and Paul overcome through creativity. In fact, Lydia receives baptism with all her family and welcomes the Apostles in her home: in this way the first church of Europe is born, a domestic church that has a woman as its head. Even today, in the synagogues of the Jews ten men are needed so that an assembly or celebration can take place. Women don't count. See therefore the great novelty: it's not a synagogue anymore, but a house. No more the need for ten males, but persons in syntony with what Jesus has said: "*Where two or three are gathered in my name...*" (Mt 18:20). Not anymore an androcentric assembly, but an assembly of equals (cf. Gal 3:28). Not an assembly depending on race, but a community of brothers (Lydia was a pagan and welcomes some Jews in her house). Even now we can already ask what function in the community had Evodia and Syntyche, mentioned by Paul in Phil 4:2.

The second domestic house in Europe is born in the house of the pagan jailer who becomes the type of every catechumen. The verses 29-34 (Acts 16) show the steps of catechesis. **1.** The desire expressed by the question "*What must I do to save myself?*" **2.** The announcement of the word. **3.** Baptism. **4.** Joy for having believed. (It is the schema already used by Luke in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, cf. Acts 8:26-40). A domestic church that has a woman as head and another under the guidance of a man. It's in this way that the Acts present the rise of the Gospel in the European continent.

3. The letter to the Philippians

Before we study in depth the content of the letter, it seems opportune to call to mind some questions: for example, the date of its writing, the place, the conditions wherein Paul found himself, and the hypothesis – largely shared – that in reality it is composed of three letters gathered into one.

The letter is written in prison (Phil 1:12ff) and a Christian of Philippi called Epaphroditus (2:25) acts as the mail carrier. The Philippian communities have invited him to see the prisoner Paul to bring him material help (4:10-20). Epaphroditus had to face great difficulties: a sickness almost ended his life (2:27), but he recovered his health and expressed his desire to return to Philippi (2:26). Paul asks that the communities offer him a good welcome, going around the probable uneasiness of those who would have wanted him as a representative of the communities next to the prisoner Paul (2:29-30). Meanwhile, Paul plans to send Timothy to Philippi (2:19-24).

These comings and goings raise the question about the place where the letter was written. From the Acts we know of two imprisonments of Paul, each one lasting two years: Cesarea (59-60) and Rome, immediately after. Cesarea and Rome, however, are very far from Philippi, while the letter implies that the communication between Paul and the Philippians is relatively easy and fast. Thus, the hypothesis of a place nearer to Philippi and of an earlier date arises. The hypothesis – accepted by almost all the scholars – is that it is Ephesus, eight days of travel from Philippi, during the third voyage of Paul. The Acts affirm that he stayed for almost three years in this city (19:10; 20:31) and it is well probable that this long sojourn is due also to a period of reclusion. Luke, however, does not mention it.

During this period Paul writes a great part of his letters. Of this epoch is his correspondence with Corinth. In 2Cor 6:5 and 11:23 he talks of "imprisonments" (in the plural), but Luke until that time has recorded only one night of arrest on the occasion of the foundation of the Philippian communities, as we have seen.

Paul's sojourn in Ephesus must have been more contentious than what the Acts inform us about it. The picture portrayed by Paul is more dramatic. In 1Cor 15:32 he says that he had to fight against "men-beasts", and in 2Cor 1:8-9 he is even more incisive: "*We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the afflic-*

tion that came to us 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.”

For these reasons – and for others, like the simplicity of the letter that makes it resemble much 1Thes – present day scholars favor Ephesus as the place from where it was written, during the third voyage, between the years 54-56. “Praetorium” (1:13) can refer to any of the three cities in question, like also the expression “house of the Emperor” (4:22) that must be taken in the broad sense = those who are at the service of the Emperor.

In the last century a hypothesis has been made – widely shared today – that the actual letter to the Philippians is, in truth, a juxtaposition of three different letters written in brief intervals of time. According to this hypothesis, Ephesus is situated well as the place of its composition because of the relative proximity of the two cities (Philippi and Ephesus), contrary to what would happen if it had been written in Cesarea or Rome. There are various literary indications that offer in favor of three letters, for example, the beginning of the third chapter. We have the impression that the letter is about to finish, but instead of ending, Paul resumes with a polemic theme, putting on guard against the ‘dogs’: *“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. Writing the same things to you is no burden for me but is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil-workers! Beware of the mutilation!”* (3:1-2) Take note of the passage from joy to alarm in a few seconds.

The same thing happens in the fourth chapter. The recommendations (4:1-9) denote that the letter is ending, but in 4:10 the new theme of gratitude for the material help that the Philippians have sent to Paul (4:10-20) gets under way.

Following the hypothesis of the three letters and overcoming some obstacle, we can better savor this authentic letter of Paul, feel the vibration of his soul and his passion for the Lord Jesus and for his mission. The hypothesis is the following:

The first letter (4:10-20). Knowing that Paul had been arrested, the Philippians sent him, through Epaphroditus (4:18), a help to alleviate his needs (4:16). It is a note of thanks. The introduction and the conclusion might have been eliminated, keeping only the nucleus.

The second letter (1:1–3:1a and 4:2-7,21-23). Paul is still in prison. In this period of time Epaphroditus becomes sick, he almost dies but recovers his health. Paul decides to restore him to the communities of Philippi. He himself carries the second letter.

The third letter (3:1b–4:1 and 4:8-9). There is no more talk about prison. Paul is free, but he comes to know about the conflicts provoked by the false missionaries. They are the “Judaists” (a word that does not appear in the New Testament): Jewish Christians who pretend to impose the Law of Moses as condition for salvation. Circumcision is its door of entrance (this theme gave origin to the letter to the Galatians). Also in this letter the introduction and the conclusion might have been eliminated in the final draft.

In our deepening we shall adopt this sequence.

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: 1. Share and study in depth the missionary geography of blessed James Alberione. Like Paul guided by the Spirit, he has opened new frontiers (the foundations). **2.** Call to mind the heroic story of Paul and Silas and compare it with that of our foundations. **3.** Compare the beginnings of our foundations (start from the manger) with the rise of the communities of Philippi (at the bank of a river, in a prison, in houses). **4.** Compare the rapport between Paul and the woman in Philippi with the rapport between Alberione and women. **5.** Are there other themes or points of contact between what we have seen and the history of the Pauline Family? What are they?

II. THE LETTER AND ITS PRINCIPAL THEMES

1. The first letter (4:10-20). Solidarity, the new liturgy

Paul is in prison and is in need. The Philippians had already helped him during the preceding voyage when he was in Thessalonica (4:16). Now they come to know of the facts and after various attempts to help the apostle in tribulation, they are able with the help of Epaphroditus to have an economic aid reach him. We do not know how much is this help, but we note Paul's satisfaction. We must remember that Paul the prisoner has put in motion a network of collaborators who traverse the neighboring cities establishing and animating communities. He himself continues the work of evangelization by means of his letters, and all that has a price that many times we do not take into consideration: parchments, copiers, trips of the mail carriers, etc. His needs were not only for personal support.

He does not stop at saying simply "many thanks", but takes advantage of this seemingly simple fact to formulate a reflection. He does not make theology starting from the abstract but from reality. In this passage we do not find the word "thanksgiving", a sign that he wanted to say something more. He prefers to call the Philippians *syn-koinone-santes* (v. 14) – a word that, as we can see, contains the term *koinonia* = communion, participation, solidarity. The Philippians have become supporters of Paul in his material needs and in his apostolic projects. All of that goes beyond the simple offering of money and becomes a *liturgy*, a service that actually is rendered to God. Take note of the *liturgical* and *cultural* language of v. 18: the help of the Philippians is received as a *sweet-smelling perfume* (*osmen euodias*, that calls to mind the aroma of the Old Testament sacrifices; cf. Ex 29:18,25; Lv 2:12; 4:31; 6:14; 8:21; 17:4,6 etc.), a *sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God* (*thysian dekten euareston to Theo*, that replaces the ancient sacrifices, cf. Lv 17:4; 19:5 etc.).

In the pericope we perceive an interchange and a solidary

communion between the Philippians and Paul. The literary analysis allows us to see that alternating between the *you* and the *I* that culminates in God: a communion/solidarity that culminates in God and that God will know how to compensate. Paul, who declares himself a debtor to all (Rom 1:14), has nothing to give in return and because of this he invokes God so that he may provide for the Philippians (vv. 19-20). The expression "my God *will provide*" (v. 19a) makes us think of the sacrifice of Abraham (Gen 22:8,14), so great is Paul's appreciation for the solidarity of the Philippians.

On v. 17 the language of commerce is used (gift, credit, account), but Paul completely inverts the commercial parameters. Solidarity is not commerce. The one who gives gains, in line with the traditional expression: "He who gives to the poor, lends to God", or, as Sir 35:2 says, "*He who gives alms makes a sacrifice of praise.*"

It's interesting to pause on the profile of Paul. He finds himself in prison, but shows *great joy* for the "liturgy" of the Philippians. Joy is a recurrent theme throughout his letter, so much so that it is called "the letter of joy" (we can read it in its entirety in this perspective). It is not any kind of joy, but joy "in the Lord" and notwithstanding many trials. The Apostle does not feel himself hostage to sufferings and necessities. In fact, he shows that he possesses the moral ideals of the most esteemed philosophers of those times – the Stoics, for example – who taught the principles of *autarcheia* (v. 11: *autarkes* = to be self-sufficient) and of *ataraxia* (imperturbability, v. 13: "*I can do all things in him who gives me the power*"). His strength comes from the Lord and he is not worried that because of the scarcity things or their abundance, the two extremes can lead to loss of faith and trust in God. It is easy not to be disturbed when you have resources. What about when you are in penury?

Paul has achieved the equilibrium of a wise man. It is worthwhile to recall the prayer of the wise and well-balanced man in Prv 30:7-9: "*Two things I ask of you, deny them not to me before I*

die: ... give me neither poverty nor riches, provide me only with the food I need, lest, being full, I deny you, saying, 'Who is the Lord?' or being in want, I steal and profane the name of my God."

We find in Matthew 10:10 (Lk 10:7) a precept of the Lord that is very dear to the conservative group of Jerusalem that was monopolizing the title of apostle. When he sent the Twelve on a mission, Jesus guaranteed their sustenance: the worker deserves his salary. In Luke this consignment is extended to all the evangelizers, included in the number 72. Paul, however, has never made of evangelization the means for gaining a living. He preferred to work with his own hands, guaranteeing sustenance for himself and for his companions. The help received from the Philippians is not seen as "take this, give me that." They help him more than once, *after* he left Philippi (Phil 4:16; 2Cor 11:8-9). This "after" confirms that he has never mixed evangelization with money. Far from the Philippians and needy, only then he accepts help. In that way he creates a frontier that preserves his independence and liberty in the matter of goods. And he does all to preserve them.

At first sight, it seems easy to answer *why Paul accepted the help of the Philippians*, making it possible furthermore to construct a theology of solidarity. The difficulty arises when we ask why he didn't do the same thing with the Corinthians and in the region of Achaia (2Cor 11:10). The obstinate refusal to accept material help from the Corinthians cost Paul painful conflicts, lengthily described in 2Cor 10–13. It seems that the principal reasons that led him to establish a special rapport with the communities of Philippi are the following: **1.** The social conditions of the persons (Lydia and others) and also of the communities, and the probable absence (or almost) of poor people, unlike the situation in Corinth where the majority was poor (cf. 1Cor 1:26. If that is true, it would be interesting to study the theme "Paul and the poor", so important for apostolic projects). **2.** The presence (and guidance) of women in the communities of Philippi: Lydia, Evodia, Syntyche.

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: Our approach to the text can happen from different angles and can illuminate many aspects of life. Here are some of them: **1.** Is there in the province (region, community) solidarity towards the needy? How does this "liturgy" come about? Fr. Alberione liked to remember Peter and John in front of the paralytic (Acts 3:1ff). What do we offer these persons? **2.** Paul reached the moral ideal of the Stoics – *autarcheia* and *ataraxia* – that make us think of the vow of poverty. Do we act in abundance in the same manner as in penury? **3.** What do Paul's independence and liberty mean for us as far as money is concerned? **4.** Is it possible to augment solidarity among Paulines? In what way? **5.** For Paul, the economic help of the Philippians also had an economic reason. How can we contribute with our apostolate to lessen misery in the world? **6.** In an interpersonal aspect, make good use of small acts of solidarity (towards the elderly, the sick...), aware that if we give, we gain.

2. The second letter (1:1–3:1a and 4:2-7,21-23).

a. Address, greeting and thanksgiving (1:1-11). The authors are two – Paul and Timothy – but we don't have anymore here the collectivism of 1Thes. Paul assumes full responsibility, and Timothy is mentioned in the beginning because he thinks of sending him to Philippi (2:9). Both of them present themselves as *servants*. In the letter we do not find the word *apostle*, a sign that Paul has preference for *servant*. Announcing the Gospel was not his choice, but an order that he received (1Cor 9:16-18). Because of this, he considers himself as an *obedient servant*. In the letter to the Philippians there is a parallelism between Jesus-servant and Paul-servant. Both divest themselves, confront death and walk towards the resurrection. The Christians of Philippi are called *saints* (compare with 1Thes 4:3) because of the baptism they have received as their answer of faith to the announcement of Jesus Christ (cf. the *active faith* of the Thessaloni-

ans, 1Thes 1:5). Baptism has introduced us into the journey of sanctity, a journey that has just begun. The saints of Philippi are a community of faith and life. They have as guides: *episcopos* (supervisors) and *diaconos* (servers), cf. 1Thes 5:12. The Philippian communities are greeted with the binomial present in all the letters of Paul: grace and peace. Grace (*charis*) recalls the *hesed* of the OT and indicates God's deep love. Peace (*eirene* – *shalom*) is the fullness of goods that guarantee life. Truly, what Paul desires for the saints of Philippi is not of little account. The one who gives grace and peace and guarantees them are “*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

As in almost all his letters (except for Galatians), Paul starts by thanking (and, later on, supplicating), vv. 3-11. The thanksgiving/supplication of the imprisoned servant is characterized by the *assiduity* with which he prays and by the *joy* that characterizes his prayer. (It's the first time that the word *joy* appears). The motive for the constant and joyful act of thanksgiving, accompanied by supplication, is the journey of persevering faith of the Philippian communities right from the first day. They have accepted the announced Gospel, they made themselves missionaries (cf. 1Thes 1:6-8), and showed solidarity (the help sent, cf. the 1st letter), “shared grace”. Sharing in grace has two aspects: internal and external; internal as regards grace, external as regards missionary commitment. Looking at the future – for “the day of Christ Jesus” – the servant prisoner is sure that the Philippian communities will not disappoint. On the contrary, they will reach perfection. Paul already thinks about the internal and external problems of these saints about whom he will talk later on. Before entering this theme, he makes a declaration of love (v. 8): “*God is my witness that I love you all with the affection of Christ Jesus*” (compare with 1Thes 2:6-12). After giving the example of love, he inserts in his action of thanksgiving a petition (to God), exactly about love, proposing (to the same love) a demanding itinerary “until the day of Christ” (vv. 9-11, cf. 1Thes 5:1ff): to grow ever more (compare with 1Thes 4:1,10) in knowledge and every kind of perception,

to discern what is of value (compare with 1Thes 5:21), so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ (Phil 3:6), filled with the fruit of righteousness.

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: The text offers various perspectives. Here are some: **1.** The letter (=our apostolate) is the result of collective work: think together, pray together, in an apostolic social body (the community). **2.** Our apostolate is a service we render to the Kingdom, in the Church and in society. Do we feel at ease when we assume the title of “servant” as when we present ourselves as “apostles”? How do we understand authority? **3.** Baptism makes us saints on the road to sanctity. At what point do we find ourselves in this road? **4.** What do we want for others when we greet each other saying “grace and peace”? **5.** In an atmosphere of joyful giving of thanks, review your journey of faith (and consecration) or the journey of the community (region, province). Give thanks for your missionary dimension, for solidarity and for “sharing in grace”. **6.** Looking at the future (to the “day of Christ Jesus”), pray for yourself (for the community...). **7.** Are we capable of saying to each other “*I love you with the love of Christ*”?

b. “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (1:12-26). After ending his thanksgiving and supplication, Paul talks of his situation in prison. Even here he works out a theological reflection starting from events – in this case, tribulations – offering for them a positive vision (v. 18: joy) and one of faith. Probably the Philippians have known of the possibility for Paul to regain his freedom. Not all had interpreted well this fact, because for some martyrdom was the summit of witness. One did more for evangelization through martyrdom than through words. Paul faces the question. His imprisonment became an occasion for testimony (Mt 10:18) because throughout the Praetorium and everywhere people talk about this prisoner and the reason for his

detention. Even for Paul “there are evils that come for what is good”. Far from getting discouraged because of his imprisonment, Paul’s companions became bolder, in such a way that the Word was not chained (cf. 2Tim 2:9). For Paul this is called “progress of the Gospel” (v. 12). Evangelization does not always advance through calm waters. The turbulence comes from outside, but it can also come from inside. Some Christians became happy because of Paul’s imprisonment and to provoke his envy, worked very hard to announce the Good News. How does Paul see this rivalry and competition within the community? Without saying anything, for now, about the competition (cf. 2:3), he relegates to the background the methods (and the persons) and focuses on the results: “*At any rate, – whether through secondary motives or sincerely – Christ is announced, of this I am happy* (v. 18b). He believes that “God writes straight through crooked lines”. And looking at his own future, he is sure that everything contributes to his salvation (cf. Rom 8:28): imprisonment, tribulation, announcement, the prayer of the Philippians and the help of the Spirit.

In this perspective, he makes everything relative: his life, death, remaining open to any eventuality (cf. Rom 8:35-39), to die or to live. Using the language of the economic world (*profit*, cf. 3:7ff), he considers it an advantage to die and to be with Christ – “*for me to live is Christ*” (cf. Gal 2:20). Having to choose between two goods (the most advantageous, of personal character, is to die), he chooses the collective good which is less advantageous but more useful for the communities and for evangelization: to live and to continue to announce Christ. His life, therefore, is in function of the mission. It is worth living as long as it is useful for the “progress of the Gospel.” It is mission that gives meaning to life, being for others. The reward or the greatest good (to be with Christ) will come as a result.

We ask ourselves for what reason Paul is so sure of continuing to live, of going out of prison and of returning to see his beloved Philippians. Some – basing themselves on the information that Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25ff) – suspect that

the prisoner would have declared his citizenship and because of this would have been freed. However, they do not explain why Paul until now would not have done it, that is, before confronting the dilemma “to die/to live.” Paul, in his letters, never mentions his possible Roman citizenship, and we must be on guard. The certainty of being released starts from this fact: throughout the Praetorium and all around the news circulates that he is being arrested because of Jesus the Messiah, and this does not constitute any crime for Roman law. In accord with this are the Acts which later on declare him innocent after his imprisonment in Jerusalem. From this his conviction that shortly he will be freed “*for your benefit and for the joy of your faith*” (v. 25b).

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: **1.** What are the tribulations for the “progress of the Gospel”? Do they come from the outside or from the inside? **2.** Are rivalries in a community positive or negative factors in relation to evangelization? What are the consequences of competition? **3.** Does the Pauline apostolate determine my life or not? **4.** What place in my life occupies “to be for others?” **5.** Fr. Alberione has very often used the phrase “for me to live is Christ.” Is this expression connected to spirituality, to the apostolate or to both? Is there a syntony between Fr. Alberione and Paul in this aspect? **6.** Besides these themes, what other in-depth reflection does this pericope merit?

c. Conduct in conformity with the Gospel (1:27–2:5). After having spoken about his situation, Paul exhorts the Philippians to live as “citizens of the Gospel” (the expression “live the life”, in Greek, is built on the word *polites* = citizen). The norm (or paradigm) for this type of citizenship is not given by the *polis* (city), but by the Gospel. There is mention of *adversaries* of the community, a sign that there are some conflicts that have come from outside. In that case, two things are advised: **1.** *unity* (one spirit, one soul) and **2.** *fearlessness* (“*without allowing yourselves to be intimidated in anything*”). In living the faith and in spreading

the message, the Philippian communities encounter the same resistance and opposition suffered by their founder (compare with 1Thes 1:6; 2:13-16). The language of vv. 28-30 is inspired by the military environment so as to describe the militancy of the followers of Jesus.

The communities had to face not only the problems coming from outside; there were tensions and conflicts even in the inside (Phil 4:2-3). Paul, who did not say anything about competition among the members, now deals with this and other critical points of life "within the walls." If we read 2:2-4 backwards, we notice at least four symptoms: **1. disunity** and discord among persons; **2. competition**; **3. attitude of superiority** and **4. individualism**. Paul's exhortation could not be stronger. He makes warm appeals to the comfort that is in Christ, to the consolation that is in love, to communion in the Spirit, with every tenderness and compassion. Against disunity, the medicine is *concord* in sentiments and thoughts, in only one love and one soul. To overcome competition and the attitude of grandeur he recommends *humility* which leads to consider others as more important (cf. Rom 12:16). To combat individualism he suggests *co-responsibility*. In other words, to be "citizens of the Gospel" means to have the attitude of Jesus Christ, make one's own his disposition in life (sentiments, v. 5). Then follows, for this purpose, one of the most important Christological hymns of the New Testament; he wants to show to the Philippians how it is to be "citizens of the Gospel."

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: **1.** The pericope suggests making a reading of our communities. How does our struggle "for the faith of the Gospel proceed"? Are there conflicts coming from outside? How are they to be confronted? **2.** Paul's exhortation reveals internal tensions: disunity, mania for greatness and superiority, individualism. What are the tensions in my community? How do I size up the individual apostolic initiatives? **3.** Paul shows some of the inalienable values that allow the community to

exist and to become a ferment in society: unity, humility, co-responsibility. What values are present in my community and what are lacking?

d. The life choice of Jesus (2:6-11). The Christological hymn of Phil 2:6-11 is a poetic text that is dense in meaning, very much studied and the object of various interpretations. Some affirm that it does not belong to Paul, and that he would have inserted it here, adding some words ("*death on the cross*", v. 8). Avoiding these speculations, we can affirm: to talk about the life choice of Jesus, the hymn certainly derives inspiration from the fourth song of the servant of Yahweh (Is 52:13-53:12), exhibiting a double movement: of *emptying*, in which the subject is Jesus (being in the form of God, he divested himself, assuming the form of a slave, like unto men; he humbled himself, obeying until death, death on a cross) and of *exaltation*, with God as agent (he resurrected him and gave him a name above every other name...). His opposite is Adam: instead of the movement of emptying, he provokes that of self-exaltation (created in the image and likeness of God, he exalted himself, wanting to be like God, he did not want to obey...); and instead of the movement of exaltation we have that of annihilation (contrary to the resurrection, death...). In this sense, Jesus is the New Man, the start of a New Humanity, the bearer of a new paradigm. In this sense, he is the true Way to Life (cf. Jn 14:6).

We can furthermore put this hymn in thematic parallel with the second part of the Gospel of St. John (13-20), above all with the episode of the washing of the feet (13:1ff): a movement of emptying: Jesus rises from the table, removes his outer garment (he empties himself), takes a towel (mark of a slave), kneels down, washes the feet...; movement of exaltation: puts his garments back on, reclines at table again... A significant detail: the washing of the feet reaches its fulfillment on the cross, when Jesus says, "It is finished," and ends in the resurrection.

At any rate, this hymn is fundamental for Paul, and shows the incarnate Jesus in human realities that are less appreciated:

emptying, divestment, service, obedience and death on the cross (sentence inflicted on criminals). The path of the Christian is traced by Christ. Exactly for this Paul tries to identify himself with him. As a Pharisee, in fact, he enjoyed an enviable status (Phil 3:6; Gal 1:13-14), but he divested and emptied himself, regarding all of that as a loss, as garbage (3:7-8). He made himself a servant (1:1), willing to die (1:21) in order to reach the resurrection (3:10-14). He can, therefore, ask the Philippians: *“Be imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who walk according to the model you have in us”* (3:17).

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: **1.** The Christological hymn explains in part why in this letter Paul does not have recourse to the title of apostle, but prefers to be called servant, identifying his life with that of Jesus-servant. What are the consequences of this fact for me, for my community, for the mission? **2.** Jesus-servant became incarnate in a culture, filling up the place of the excluded. So does Paul. What does “to incarnate oneself in the culture of communication” today mean? **3.** What does to be Paul’s imitators today mean? What life choices animate my Pauline being?

e. Consequences (2:12-18). The “therefore” (v. 12) unites closely what we have already seen (the hymn) with what comes afterwards. Paul shows the consequences for the Christian life. The pericope begins talking of Paul’s absence from Philippi (v. 12) and ends with the possibility of having to face martyrdom (v. 17). In any case, he rejoices and asks the Philippians to rejoice with him (v. 18). In this letter, *joy* surpasses the happy events, because even martyrdom as a result of the mission is reason for rejoicing (cf. Rom 12:12; 1Thes 2:19).

What are for us the consequences of the life choice of Jesus-servant? Paying attention to the verbs in the imperative, we note that the Philippians are called to obedience in two points:

1. *“Work for your salvation with fear and trembling”* and **2.** *do all without murmuring and protesting.*” The first point shows the dynamism of the Christian journey made in alliance with God. Salvation is a divine gift that is obtained through qualified human commitment. God works in the person the will and the doing (will and action), and the person responds to the will of God working out his salvation with fear and trembling. Life is a shipyard of works wherein we build our salvation or perdition. The second point illustrates the manner of doing (*“do all...”*), not how the Hebrew people in the desert acted when they murmured against God and Moses. The new manner of behaving throws light outside the community: it ferments society (*“an evil and perverse generation”*) and enlightens it (*“in the midst of which you shine like stars in the world”*) as bearers of the Christian novelty (*“messengers of the Word of life”*).

The servant Paul looks at the ending of the journey (the Day of Christ) and considers himself as an athlete (v. 16b; cf. 2Tim 4:7), whose race acquires meaning if the Philippians will keep themselves firm. On account of this it does not matter to him if he will have to face martyrdom. His poured out blood is a libation. (In the Jewish sacrifices the libation was an amount of vinegar, wine or water, that was poured on the victim, Ex 29:40; Nm 27:8; cf. 2Tim 4:6). The blood that Paul will shed will advance the cause of evangelization, and that is reason for joy.

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: **1.** From the Christological hymn Paul draws two consequences for the Philippians and one for him (martyrdom). Do they also apply to us? What other consequences can we add? **2.** “To will and to act” were important themes in the life and words of the Founder. Does this have repercussions in us? **3.** Is my community ferment, light, and bearer of the Word of life for the “evil and perverse generation”? **4.** Share and contemplate the life and dedication of the Paulines who have offered their life as a “libation.”

f. Sharing the life (2:19–3:1a and 4:2-7,21-23). The rest of the second letter is made up of news (2:19-30), recommendations (3:1a; 4:2-7) and final greeting (4:21-23). Paul appreciates the exchange of news with his communities, news by means of letters or persons. Timothy is about to be sent to Philippi with the task of bringing news to Paul the prisoner. The news will arouse *joy*. Timothy's trip to Philippi (distance, time, expenses, etc.) for the sole purpose of having good news must not have taken place recently. His going to Philippi has not yet been decided, because it depends on the turn of events. Perhaps Paul himself, after being freed from prison, will be able to undertake the trip. Precariousness and uncertainties do not impede a joyous life.

Paul praises Timothy: he is the person most in agreement with his projects, like a son with his father. Timothy shows himself concerned not only with Paul, but also with the Philippians. That is all the more important inasmuch as even among the companions of Paul there are those who look only after themselves and their own interests (2:21; cf. 2:4).

Before the departure of Timothy, Epaphroditus returns to Philippi after having brought the economic help of the communities to the prisoner Paul (1st letter). The letter does not spare praises to the Philippian messenger: brother, collaborator and companion in struggle (cf. Phlm 2). He surely returns from his own with the 2nd letter. The Philippians had chosen him as their representative before Paul, something that shows the affection cultivated by these communities toward their founder. It happened that Epaphroditus fell gravely sick, intensifying the worry of Paul and of the communities. It was therefore decided that he return to Philippi. Fearing perhaps some ill feelings because of the return, Paul advises that he be received joyously and be given the esteem that he truly deserves. There is in vv. 25-30 an atmosphere of deep fraternity, affection, concern of one towards the others, nostalgia, joy. The sickness of Epaphroditus has caused worry and sadness in everybody; his death would have been additional sadness. Paul puts to good use the sentiment of nostalgia and knows how to acknowledge the risks that persons

run to help others, the time dedicated to companions (cf. Rom 16:1-4; 12:10,15-16; 13:8).

After the news come the exhortations (3:1a; 4:2-7). The first is addressed to everyone and gives force to one of the most important themes of the letter, joy: "*Finally, brothers, rejoice in the Lord.*" Conditions that are adverse for Paul and uncertainties lived by the community cannot suffocate the sentiment of joy.

The second exhortation is addressed to the supervisors, two women (Evodia and Syntyche) and a man (Sizigo). Some believe that these names are fictitious, but it is preferable to believe that they are concrete persons, probably supervisors competing among themselves. He asks that the two women be *unanimous (to auto fronein)*, as in 2:2 (*to auto fronountes*). He asks Sizigo to help them, consolidating what has been recommended in 2:4. Sometimes only the discord of these two women gets attention, ignoring the positive way of treating them on the part of Paul. He asks Sizigo to help them because in their turn they had helped him and others in the struggle for the Gospel.

The third exhortation is general (4:4-7) and is motivated by the nearness of the Lord (cf. 1Thes 5:1-11). If in 1Thes he recommended mutual consolation, here he recommends – with emphasis – joy. The nearness of the Lord is not a motive of disturbance; on the contrary, he advises one of the values most highly regarded by the Stoics, *ataraxia* (imperturbability). Paul does not disdain the good things present in those who are not Christians, contrary to what the Pharisees did with regard to the non-Jews. Imperturbability supposes difficulties, tensions, conflicts. The right way to avoid disturbance is to present to God the needs in the various forms experienced by the communities: invoking him, supplicating him and thanking him in order to reach the peace of God.

The final greeting (4:21-23) closes the letter in an atmosphere of general fraternity among the saints (Christians) of Philippi and those of Ephesus. Attention is being called by the fact that *especially* the Christians "of the household of the Emperor" are sending their greetings together with the others. It does not

matter where he is, whether in Cesarea, in Rome or in Ephesus: the prisoner Paul succeeded in bringing to the faith all the personnel serving the Emperor (cf. 1:13).

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: **1.** News, exhortations, and greetings are a sharing of life. Are we accustomed to share with joy the good things of our communities? **2.** Paul recognizes the dedication of Timothy and Epaphroditus, evaluating it positively. Does the same thing happen among us? **3.** Paul shows a special attention for the sick. What about us? **4.** Between the group of Paul and the Philippians there is an atmosphere of deep fraternity, affection, mutual concern, nostalgia, joy. Does all this suggest something to our communities? **5.** What is the profile of my community: joyful, indifferent, full of bitterness? Does this have an effect on pastoral promotion of vocation? **6.** Is it possible to live more united or are we resigned to divisions? **7.** What does “have no anxiety at all” mean for us? Does confident prayer in the Lord help us in this? **8.** Does the world that surrounds us have some values to offer us? **9.** Are there other aspects of the 2nd letter that have not been taken in consideration?

3. The third letter (3:1b–4:1 and 4:8-9): “Be imitators of me”

The third letter does not mention anymore either the imprisonment or the visits to the communities in Philippi. The theme of joy has disappeared, even if Paul is free. The text is polemical. Paul becomes aggressive, he calls his adversaries dogs, evil-workers and mutilated. He writes weeping (3:18), puts on guard (three times he says: “*be on guard against...*”), asks that they imitate him... All this and other factors put us in another situation. This letter is very similar to letter to the Galatians in theme and probably even as to date.

Christians of Jewish origin and culture have certainly passed by Philippi. We usually call them *Judaizers*. They succeeded in

disturbing the life of the community (cf. 4:6), sowing confusion. The thesis upheld by these Jewish-Christians can be summed up in the passage of Acts 15:1b: “*If you do not circumcise yourselves according to the custom of Moses, you cannot save yourselves.*” Circumcision, therefore, is *the condition* for salvation. Paul assures that with that the cross of Christ becomes useless (Gal 5:2) and those who act in this way are enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18b). Even more, since circumcision is the door of entrance to the first alliance, one who is circumcised is obliged to completely fulfill the Law (cf. Gal 5:3). The serious consequence: to be a Christian, first of all it would be necessary to become a Jew, to entirely adopt Jewish ways and culture. Religion, therefore, would not be the expression of faith originating from the culture of every people, but the expression of faith passing through the Jewish culture.

Paul is very angry. He treats with contempt the Judaizers. The radical Jews used to call the pagans “dogs” (because the dogs eat anything, and because of this they were numbered among the most dirty animals). The letter throws back the meaning, calling the Judaizers “dogs” and saying to be on guard against them (bear in mind that the Christians of Philippi are originally pagans). Paul calls these Judaizers “evil-workers” and “mutilated” (contempt for the circumcision. Men and animals that are mutilated were not respectively fit and proper for the cult). As in the letter to the Galatians, Paul unmasks the Judaizers, affirming that they have despicable and unmentionable intentions, that they want to cut the body of men (circumcision) to be able to boast about it (Gal 6:13; Phil 3:19). Paul calls “flesh” (3:3-4) all these things – norms that the Pharisees held in high consideration. There is now a new circumcision, already announced by the prophets (Jer 4:4), seal of the new alliance (31:31-35) that is expressed in a new liturgy and in a new cult (Phil 3:3).

To give prominence to the excellence of the novelty, Paul describes in detail the time during which he had lived in the “flesh”, reaching the level of an irreprehensible Pharisee. They are seven titles (vv. 5-6; compare with Gal 1:13-14). Using the

language of business (gain/loss), he considers as *dung* his career as a blameless Pharisee. The Pharisees had listed 613 important commandments. One who practiced them scrupulously attained blamelessness and in a certain way obliged God to intervene in his favor. The Pharisees believed that when all had put into practice the 613 commandments, God would have sent the Messiah as a *reward* for the *justice that is in the Law*." Paul discovers that notwithstanding that all were sinners, the Messiah had already come and had loved humankind to the point of submitting his life on the cross (Rom 5:8; Gal 2:20; Jn 3:16). One therefore asks: how did being a blameless Pharisee help me? It was never of any help in any way, it is *dung*, because it is not the justice of man that provokes the love of God. The Messiah did not come as a reward for human justice, but as a proof that divine love is sovereign and always anticipates human love. Understanding this has put to death the Pharisee that was in Paul.

As a blameless Pharisee, Paul considered himself perfect, complete, right. As a follower of Jesus Christ, he considered himself as an athlete running after the Lord, because Jesus walks ahead and waits for him at the finishing line with the reward of the resurrection. To be a Christian, therefore, means dynamism. It is opposed to Pharisaical immobility. Paul considers himself as having been reached by Jesus and who has passed beyond him. As an athlete, he runs so as to reach him, forgetting what is behind (the blameless Pharisee) and he launches himself forward. And he invites the community to do as he does (3:15-17).

The reward is the resurrection, the heavenly citizenship (vv. 2-21; cf. 1Cor 15:47-49; 2Cor 5:1-10), when we shall be transfigured like the glorious body of Christ (cf. 1Cor 15:23-28; compare with 1Thes 4:13-18). Because of this, Paul exhorts the Philippians to be constant (4:1). It is a general exhortation that is full of affection and joy, a sign that, as we have seen in the 2nd letter, it is possible to be happy in tribulation, to experience affection during struggle.

The letter is heading towards the end ("*in conclusion*", 4:8), presenting another general exhortation. Instead of the 613 com-

mandments to be observed, he offers an open horizon and a conduct characterized by good. Paul quotes seven moral values of the philosophers of his time: all that is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, honorable, virtuous and praiseworthy, should be the concern and occupation of all. Paul uses the verb *logizomai* that does not suppose prefabricated styles of life coming from the outside, but germinating from the inside, the fruit of discernment (cf. 1Thes 5:21). In this, Paul shows himself to be an *educator* ("you have learned"), a *father* ("you have inherited"), a *master* ("you have heard") and an *example* ("you have observed in me"). And he concludes: "*And the God of peace will be with you.*"

Suggestions for a Pauline reading: **1.** Phil. 3 is one of the chapters most quoted by the Founder. Let your community share it. **2.** In this chapter we contemplate the death of Paul as a blameless Pharisee and the rise of the Christian and dynamic athlete. How does this affect my life, my community and my mission? Is it possible to associate this with the new technologies and the new languages of communication? **3.** Comment with examples on the following affirmation: the imposition of a culture aborts the native vocations. **4.** Who, according to your view, are the modern Judaizers and what are their propositions? **5.** What is the equivalent today of making useless the cross of Christ? **6.** Paul does not forget to be affectionate and loving while in struggle and conflict. Does this fact give light to our rapport with the recipients of our mission? **7.** Paul does not furnish a list of commandments, but opens the horizon, embracing "what is worthy of praise." Does this help in our choice of contents and values? **8.** According to you, are there points in the letter that deserve more attention and in-depth consideration? **9.** In what aspects have you identified yourself most with Paul? **10.** How do you evaluate this study of the letter to the Philippians? **11.** Has its division into three letters helped you in deepening it?

III. BLESSED ALBERIONE AND THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

After having meditated directly what Paul writes to the Philippians, with the help of the results obtained by exegetical studies and with some questions that apply to us Paulines the riches of the contents of the texts, we observe how our Founder has meditated and used the letter to the Philippians. Drawing from the **Opera Omnia** of the writings of Fr. Alberione, the quotes that follow don't pretend to be exhaustive, but rather want to be a beginning to be completed through a personal and communitarian knowledge of Primo Maestro. Among the references most quoted by Fr. Alberione from the letter to the Philippians, we can enumerate the following.

1. **"For me, in fact, to live is Christ" (1:21).** Paul, after his experience on the road to Damascus, finds in Christ the full meaning of his entire existence. Fr. Alberione, fascinated by the centrality of Christ in the life of Paul, often turns to this text to point out the nature of the Pauline spirituality: the progressive **Christification** is the content, the method and the goal of sanctification and the apostolate. The spirituality of Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life defines the style of Pauline life as full conformity to the integral Christ (dogma, morals and cult) of the totality of the person (mind, heart and will). "My life is Christ," said St Paul; ... May Christ, Way, Truth and Life live in us! Then, it will not be man anymore who wills, thinks and loves but it will be Jesus Christ who will think, act and love in man. The error lies in dividing Christ. There was one who admired his sublime truths like Rousseau, but without accepting his morals and without living in union with Jesus Christ; one admires his excellent virtues but reduces Christianity to mere sentiment. On the contrary, it is necessary to accept his word with faith, to imitate his holy examples and to possess in us the supernatural life of grace" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1946-1949, p. 598ff*).

2. **"I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ..." (1:23).** Living and dying are taken into consideration by Paul only starting from his relation with Christ. Death would allow the full realization of his union with the glorified Christ. Often quoted in Latin, "*cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*", Paul's desire to die, to be with Christ in a definite way is used by blessed James Alberione especially during the Spiritual Exercises and every time that he wants to emphasize the role of the eternal truths (death, judgment, hell and heaven) to impress on Pauline life a vigorous supernatural tension.

"We have resolved, during this course of Exercises, to achieve three goals: 1) to feel more vividly our faith in that article of the Creed that says: "*I believe in eternal life*"; 2) that our hearts orient themselves towards heaven and love Jesus, God: "*Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*" and Paradise in order to be united with Christ; 3) the choice of means to reach that beautiful Paradise that awaits us" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1940-1945, p. 478*). "The thought of heaven must detach us from earth and make us use everything as just a means; make us fervent, ... prepare for us the desire for heaven, *cupio dissolvi*, and that this desire become the king of desires, resulting in thirst for merits, perfection and souls" (*Donec formetur Christus in vobis, n. 33*).

3. **"Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus" (2:5).** In the harmony of only one "manner of feeling in Christ Jesus", Paul indicates the standard that must inspire the solution of every relationship problem within the Christian community. The "attitude of Christ" is indicated by blessed James Alberione as the rule of fraternal charity, of relations among the Institutions of the Pauline Family and as stimulus for the anxiety to arrive at souls in the apostolate. "And there are souls who have understood the mystery of redemption: '*Have this in yourselves that is in Christ Jesus.*' With what thoughts and sentiments the Good Shepherd immolated himself on the cross!" (*Alle Suore di Gesù Buon Pastore, 1963, p. 60*).

4. **“... becoming obedient unto death, and death on the cross” (2:8).** “To empty oneself” of the divine condition to become fully human and to live in continuous obedience the mission entrusted to him by the Father, is for Paul the central event of the life of Christ and the model of every existence lived in reference to Christ. The obedience of Christ to the will of the Father is constantly pointed out by blessed James Alberione in order to live faithfully the religious vocation and the Pauline apostolate. The route of Christ from his divine condition to his death on the cross is the model of reference of Pauline obedience that has for its beginning the will of the Father and the beneficiaries of the addressees of our mission.

Inviting us to unite our life to the Eucharistic sacrifice, Fr. Alberione explains: “Yes, we have to offer not only Jesus Christ to the Heavenly Father, but also ourselves; in particular, offer him our will, one that is firm and constant, *until death* as Jesus Christ’s: whatever you want, o heavenly Father, do with me whatever pleases you” (*Alle Suore di Gesù Buon Pastore, 1959, p. 147*).

5. **“... forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I run towards the goal” (3:13).** The exclusive reference to Christ in the life of Paul allows a different version of the means for sanctification: the perfection that is pleasing to God is not the result of scrupulous observance of the Law, but of constant growth in likeness to Christ. In the process of Christification there is no fixed finishing line that can justify stopping for having reached the goal: it is a matter of constant straining forward, like the running of an athlete in permanent tension.

The dynamism of Paul was strongly internalized by blessed James Alberione who lived and left as an unchangeable characteristic of the Pauline charism the continuous “straining forward.”

In announcing the first course of Spiritual Exercises lasting for a month (1960), Fr. Alberione makes a rapid assessment of the first 45 years of the Congregation (1914-1959): “As long as there is something yet to be done, we have done nothing; ‘forgetting

the good accomplished, I strain forward’: in spirit, in knowledge, in the apostolate, in poverty. Many times, not even the needed rest was asked; ‘let us work, let us work; in Paradise we shall rest’ ” (*San Paolo, Nov. 1958*).

6. **“Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us” (3:17).** Paul does not hesitate to propose himself as a model of imitation of Christ because on the one hand he clearly knows the vocation he received and on the other he identifies with clarity behaviors that are contrary to Christ. Blessed James Alberione takes it for himself and invites all the Paulines to make their own the pressing exhortation of Paul to imitate him. “Study always and love St. Paul; be devoted to him who casts light on our whole life, on the apostolate and on zeal, who made himself a model for his own and for us who are his: ‘you have your model in us’ ” (*San Paolo, Nov. 1958*).

7. **“Our citizenship is in heaven” (3:20).** Describing the difference between the true and the false imitators of Christ, Paul makes use of the contrast between a feeling “directed to the things of the earth” and a “citizenship in heaven.” To let life be oriented to heaven, blessed James Alberione recommends the Eucharistic visit: “Yes, indeed, our way of thinking, living, reasoning, behaving, speaking, etc., are always inspired by the truths of faith. This means to be fervent” (*Alle Suore di Gesù Buon Pastore, 1959, p. 73*).

The abundant presence of the last things (death, judgment, hell and paradise) in the reflection and teaching of blessed James Alberione has a positive salutary purpose: to foster the perseverance of intentions: “The thought of Heaven must give us courage. There are days when everything seems to be pleasing and easy, while at times everything is laborious and difficult; it’s here that the thought of heaven spurs us on. ... When duty requires effort and renouncement, the thought of the reward that awaits us, if it is alive in us, encourages us, gives us strength and makes

us overcome everything because there is no comparison between the future reward and the present difficulties" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1934-1939*, p. 655).

8. **"Rejoice in the Lord always; I repeat, rejoice!" (4:4).** The invitation to joy is like the spiritual atmosphere of the texts written by Paul to the communities of Philippi; its presence is justified by reference to the Lord, to whom to entrust oneself in prayer, and by the peace that characterizes community life when it is founded on God. In spite of his being aware of difficulties, recurring in the words of blessed James Alberione is the invitation to individual joy ("Be joyful!") as well as community joy ("Be content and happy!") as a consequence of a life completely dedicated to God.

Commenting on *Phil 4:4* in a sermon to the Daughters of St. Paul, blessed James Alberione explains: "If we understood what our life in Christ means, we would always be content, full of enthusiasm, courage and joy. Life then becomes more beautiful, even if full of pains. However, the same intentions of Jesus Christ are necessary, as well as his aims, his thoughts and his desires" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1934-1939*, p. 667).

"Be happy; I repeat, be happy," says St. Paul. "Where there is no joy, either the devil is there or is about to come in. ... Individual happiness and family happiness. Let there be in every house somebody who always spreads the sign of holy joy: such a one will contribute to health and will give relief even in the midst of the most difficult works and painful trials. ... Happiness in the apostolate, especially in your apostolate that puts you in continuous contact with the world. ... Show that you are happy to serve them and that you are doing something good. Joy transpires and produces beneficial impressions. Happy souls, a happy family, a happy apostolate. Happy souls make themselves holy more quickly. A sad saint is a saint that is sad" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1946-1949*, p. 502).

9. **"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is**

gracious, if there is any excellence or anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (4:8). The project of Christian life indicated by St. Paul also includes the adoption of values that have been elaborated by Greek philosophy and that enjoy esteem and respect in social life. With constant regularity, blessed James Alberione has called attention to this Pauline text to motivate the need to appreciate human values that are positive in themselves and prepare for direct evangelization.

Talking about the order of our editorial contents, the Primo Maestro reminds: "Our editions are to exude the Pauline spirit, expressed by the words of St. Paul who, after having indicated what is essential: 'to live in Christ,' adds to the Philippians: 'Finally, brothers, etc.'" (*Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae*, n. 70) Furthermore: "Give first of all the saving doctrine. Penetrate with the Gospel the whole of human thought and knowledge. Don't talk only of religion, but talk of everything in a Christian way" (*Id.*, n. 87).

In the text that Fr. Alberione writes during the inauguration of our radio in Japan, he expressly quotes *Phil 4:8*: "The program of the transmissions of this radio station is that indicated by St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians" (*San Paolo*, July 1949).

10. **"I know how to live in penury, how to live in abundance; in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I can do all things through him who gives me the power" (4:12-13).** While he praises and thanks the generosity of the Philippians, Paul explains his intentions in receiving help: he has attained the wisdom of being content in every condition, thanks to the help that comes to him from Christ. Talking of religious poverty, blessed James Alberione often explicitly refers to this passage of St. Paul: "After that of the Divine Master, our father St. Paul gave us examples of religious poverty. In fact, he said: "I know how to live in abundance and in difficult conditions" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1934-1939*, p. 275).

Our collaboration as answer to the gift of faith is expressed also through our full trust in God: "It is necessary that on earth we always enrich ourselves with merits, so that one day we may be able to enjoy our God in Paradise. But our merits are of little worth: the one who will save us is Jesus Christ. Blessed is he who with the passing of years increases his confidence in the infinite merits of Jesus! In the company of Jesus we can do all, as St. Paul said: "I can do all through him who gives me the power" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1946-1949*, p. 389).

Through a careful research of his **Opera Omnia**, we can add other quotes of the Primo Maestro from the letter to the Philip- pians: "**convinced as I am that He who began this good work in you, will bring it to fulfillment, until the day of Jesus Christ**" (1:6); "**I carry you in my heart**" (1:7); "**I pray that your love may always increase and ever more in knowledge and in every kind of discernment**" (1:9); "**in any case, live a style of life worthy of the Gospel of Christ**" (1:27); "**do nothing out of rivalry or vainglory, but with humility regard others as more important than yourselves; let no one seek his own interest, but each one also that of others**" (2:3-4); "**work out your salvation in fear and trembling**" (2:12); etc.

The assimilation of the thought of St. Paul in the letter to the Philippians through the work of blessed James Alberione, con- firms the importance of the Apostle for us Paulines: "St. Paul is our model. He proposes himself as an example, not in an abso- lute way, but as to form, the manner in which he imitated Jesus Christ, who is truly the absolute example of every perfection. He says: I made myself a model for you (*Phil 3:17*). What does model mean? When you have composed a book and have paged it, you put the model or form in the machine. It means that on that model copies are to be printed. He is the model upon which the Paulines must be printed: everybody according to his model or form. ... Conform yourselves to your Father; that is, have yourselves printed on the same form" (*Pr SP 290-291*).

IV. THE PAULINES OF TODAY AND THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

The interpretation of the letter to the Philippians made by blessed James Alberione is for us an indispensable teaching and, at the same time, it represents an encouragement to continue, as an entire Congregation scattered in the five continents and composed of diverse generations, to keep alive the testimony of St. Paul in the social, ecclesial and communications context wherein we live the Pauline charism. The theme of the VIII General Chapter reminds us of the need for creative fidelity **To be St. Paul living today. A Congregation that strains forward**. Let us apply to us Paulines of today some passages written by Paul to the Philippians.

1. "**For me, in fact, to live is Christ**" (1:21). What St. Paul writes about Jesus in his letter to the Philippians is the fruit of his constant and total experience of Christ: after that encounter on the road to Damascus, everything became a "rejection" compared to "Christ, my Lord" (3:8). Paul's **Christology** is the description of a relationship that had a beginning, that had radically made a mark to the point of changing a life and that remains always present to give meaning to life and death. The experience of Christ is born of a **communications event** and it endures as a continuing **interpersonal relationship** for the whole life of the Apostle.

Every Pauline and the totality of the communities of the Congregation find in the Christology lived and described by Paul the example of a faith relationship that must nourish our individual, communitarian and apostolic life. The Founder has left us the **Christology of Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life**, indicat- ing to us in St. Paul the model who has best lived and thought this identity.

Taking into account the concrete needs of the Congregation, I would like to suggest **some responsibilities** that we have with regard to the Christology of Paul, understood as complete vital

relationship, remembering well the interpretation the Primo Maestro made for us Paulines through the formulation of the spirituality of Christ, Master Way, Truth and Life.

1.1. The examination of the contents and of the editorial style in order to present, in the material for the **vocation proposal**, the spirituality of Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life can help us understand that it is not enough to write and talk about this Alberionian Christological definition or to reproduce the image of a statue or of a painting so that it may become the proposal of a fascinating spirituality for the young man of today.

The difficulty to transmit something that is interesting is attested even by the first periods of **Pauline formation** with the aspirants: before entering into contact with the Paulines, rare enough if not inexistent is an experience of Christ presented as Master, Way, Truth and Life or as definition or as a representation in image. I have had manner to hear directly about rather surprised reactions of aspirants in the face of our Christological definition that is not immediately assimilated as to allow expression of a relationship involving faith.

And yet, especially the more mature generations know well the thought of blessed James Alberione concerning the spirituality formulated by him and proposed to the Paulines of all times. From what Fr. Alberione says in *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae* (nos. 159-160), we see the seriousness of his search to give us an adequate spirituality for the apostolic mission in communication. The systematic invitations that the Founder used to send off after the redaction of works dedicated to our spirituality are a sign that a sufficient deepening of what he has sketched has not yet been found.

His determination remains when he talks about Pauline spirituality: "It is not a beautiful expression, it is not an advice: it is the substance of the Congregation; it is to be or not to be Paulines" (*PrDM 72-73*). Still more: "Such devotion is not reduced to a simple prayer or to some song, but it takes up the whole person. ... Our devotion to the Divine Master must be learned in order to thereafter apply it to spiritual work, study, apostolate and to the whole of religious life" (*PrDM 80*).

In order to deepen, live and propose the spirituality of Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life, I consider it dutiful to call to mind the permanent validity of two publications: ***L'eredità cristocentrica di Don Alberione*** (The Christocentric heredity of Fr. Alberione: Acts of the international seminar on Pauline spirituality, Ariccia 16-27 Sept. 1984) and ***Gesù, il Maestro ieri, oggi e sempre*** (Jesus the Master, yesterday, today and forever: Acts of the international seminar on "Jesus, the Master", Ariccia, 14-24 Oct. 1996).

1.2. Besides the responsibility of proposing and forming the young generations in Pauline spirituality, there is also the duty to know how to communicate it in our **editorial activity, media, multimedia and web**. "How are we as far as apostolate is concerned? First of all: let us hold the general principle of having to give Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life, that is, as He is: everything. He is the Truth: give therefore the clear doctrine. He is the Way: give therefore to the world the virtues, that is, teach the imitation of Christ. He is the Life: life is drawn from Him, from the Sacraments" (*PrA 88*).

The other principle of Pauline editorship taken by the Primo Maestro, as already recalled, from the letter to the Philippians (4:8): "Do not talk only of religion, but talk of everything in a Christian way" has inspired the VIII General Chapter to approve the preferential apostolic option **To humanize in order to Christianize**. Making its own and integrating a text prepared by the CTIA (International Technical Committee of the Apostolate) to respond to the request of the operative guideline 3.2.1., the General Government has approved the **Editorial, content and addressees guidelines of the Pauline apostolate** that must inspire from now on the redaction of every *Apostolic project* of the Circumscriptions.

1.3. We Paulines of today, besides assimilating the meaning wanted by Fr. Alberione the spirituality of Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life, must also assume the responsibility of keeping alive the desire of the Primo Maestro to **deepen the meaning** of this heredity, trying new expressive forms. While he

was still living, Fr. Alberione asked some Paulines to do researches on our spirituality that gave origin to publications on Jesus Master that we can read fruitfully. He has thought of and several times outlined the contents of the magazine *Magisterium* and laid out a broad project for an *encyclopedia on Jesus Master*. He personally worked on an inquiry international in scale so as to propose to the Holy See to extend to the whole Church the *feast of Jesus Master*.

The reflection that on the level of university research and in pastoral for a long time now is being realized concerning *Christ, the perfect communicator*, could be for us a chance to rethink and re-express our spirituality through the values and categories of the phenomenon of communication. Our editorship and our centers of formation in communication could, in the spirit of articles 74-76 of the *Constitutions and Directory*, favor the research and putting in circulation of a spirituality for the Pauline communicator and for all in the ecclesial community who are interested in committed life in communication as an apostolic mission.

2. ***“Have in yourselves the same attitudes of those who are in Christ Jesus” (2:5)***. It is from his life experience with Christ that St. Paul gets the necessary criteria for formulating a style of Christian communitarian life: from Christology he lets **ecclesiology** spring out.

2.1. In the community of Philippi there are, among the Christians themselves, conflicts that have arisen because of egoisms, rivalries and vainglory. To indicate the adequate solution, Paul does not have recourse to a series of rules of living together, but to the earthly episode of Christ: “Christ made himself obedient unto death, and death on the cross” (2:1-11). The rule of life of the Christian community is the example, “the attitude” that has motivated the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ.

Taking in the invitation of the Apostle, the Paulines, in the formulation and application of the **Community project**, should

know how to inspire themselves with the dynamism of Christ’s existence, lived in obedience to the Father. The commitment to have “the same attitude of the Lord” (4:2) has priority with respect to all the rest. It is not the list of things done together that defines in **theological** perspective our communities, but the principal concern of everyone: **“for me to live is Christ.”** The supernatural motivation, lived with renewed commitment with the passing of years, is the first collaboration in the building of community life.

Christ’s obedience to the will of the Father allows us to consider our relationships as Pauline religious and our common apostolic activity making use of the vow of **obedience**, understood as total availability to God, fraternal life where one does not “search his own interest, but each one also that of the others”, and attentive listening to the needs of the addressees of our apostolate. The obedience of Christ that Paul proposes to the Christians of Philippi leads to resurrection and exaltation. Obedience in Pauline life aims at building the Congregation as **mystical body**.

2.2. The dynamism of the obedience of Christ emphasized by Paul produces another effect in the life of the ecclesial community: **the search for perfection** not as a result of personal effort, but of ever more intimate relationship with Christ. Paul describes with vigor his radical transformation in relation to perfection: not justice won through observance of the law, but the justice that comes from God in Christ.

The curricula outlined by the **Formative iter** and by the **Projects of on-going formation** must know how to integrate with wisdom the methodology that was lived and recommended by Paul for the spiritual work that should characterize the whole life of every Pauline.

It is easier to motivate the young Paulines in formation so that they accept a journey of human maturation, either through personal exercise or with the help of specialists. More complicated turns out starting from a process of spiritual maturation where the motor element is not a succession of stages that can

be programmed, but rather the gradual abandonment in an interpersonal relationship with Christ, moved by the Spirit. The temptation to live faith in Christ by limiting oneself to a scrupulous observance of norms makes useless a fidelity that in fact is equally rigorous, but based on the freedom of a relationship of love.

Of help to us can be what blessed James Alberione writes concerning the development of personality: "Perhaps there was an excess of liberty, so that somebody abused it, with the consequences that derive from it. This way requires – it is true – deep persuasion: but instruction, deep convictions, use of the Sacraments, spiritual direction, thinking of the last things, all these keep the person on the right way, or if the same goes astray, calls him back. It is a method that is more laborious and lengthy, but more useful" (*Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae*, nos. 148-149).

2.3. Faith understood as a living relationship with Christ stamps a permanent dynamism on personal and communitarian life: "forgetting what lies behind and straining towards what lies ahead, I run towards the goal" (2:13).

Taking up the legacy of the Founder who drew from Paul his determination to constantly "**strain forward**" that can be realized also by committing to "**progress a little every day**", we Paulines must utilize ever better this element of our charism that is constitutive and immutable.

To strain forward as characteristic of the Pauline who does not allow himself to be fossilized by fleeting time, in any aspect of his vocation and mission.

To strain forward as attitude of our communities that intend to walk with the times with the help of a on-going formation.

To strain forward as a Congregation capable of renewing itself in its projects, of assimilating the changes in the Church, of adopting new forms of communication, of perceiving changes in society, of maintaining the pioneering spirit and of being aware of the task to operate as an avantgarde laboratory to preach Christ today.

To strain forward in creative fidelity to the Pauline charism, knowing how to synthesize a documented knowledge of the thought and work of the Primo Maestro with a clear analysis of the historical context in which God calls us to live. This twofold knowledge is motivated by the need to preach the whole Christ in the whole world of communication today.

3. "**... my situation has turned out rather to advance the gospel**" (1:12). Finding himself in prison, Paul assures the Philippians that his fetters have not chained the preaching of the gospel: "my condition as a prisoner for the cause of Christ has become known to the entire praetorium and to all the others" (1:3). Paul's vital relation with Christ even in prison becomes an occasion for evangelization: **Christology inspires the work of evangelization.**

3.1. Paul has evangelized not only with words and letters, but also with his chains. To be arrested "for the cause of Christ" transforms even the meaning of his life in prison and of his appearances in tribunals which become occasions to preach.

Paul's ability to put everything at the service of the gospel must be for us Paulines a guarantee of the validity of what blessed James Alberione says: "The Society of St. Paul seeks for its apostolate the most effective and fastest means that human ingenuity provides for the preaching of the gospel" (*Unione Cooperatori Apostolato Stampa* [1938], n. 9, p. 196). With hard-working prudence, the Congregation which aims to be St. Paul living today is invited **to be open to the adoption of the entire communication:** without neglecting its commitment in the printed paper, it is necessary to employ more the multimedia initiatives, presence in web communication and a leadership in thought in the research in communication and in public opinion.

Paul's chains at the service of the gospel help us to make use also of **all the forms of apostolate** that characterize the Pauline

Family: apostolate of communication, apostolate of the International Catholic Bible Society, apostolate of prayer, apostolate of interior life, Eucharistic apostolate, liturgical apostolate, service to the priesthood apostolate, parish apostolate, apostolate of vocations, apostolate of reparation, apostolate of witnessing and apostolate of suffering. With the passing of time, the Congregation lives with greater intensity the condition of advanced age and suffering and she urges us to make ours and to make use in practice the invitation of the Founder: "Let suffering be changed into apostolate... Thereupon we feel that even while lying in bed we can have a wide apostolate in the heart of the Church" (*Sermons of the Primo Maestro* 5 [1957], p. 103ff).

3.2. In prison for Christ, Paul in his preaching involves even the Christians of Philippi: "...I hold you in my heart, you who are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" (1:7). His strength in chains supports the preaching of others: "...the majority of the brothers, having taken encouragement in the Lord from my imprisonment, dare more than ever to proclaim the word fearlessly" (1:14).

In this period of the Congregation, the example of Paul's "condition as a prisoner" that allows "many to take courage in the Lord and to proclaim the word fearlessly", can make us think, with a certain freedom of association, of the responsibility we have to **keep watch on our identity** as apostles of communication.

The ecclesial community, starting first of all from Vatican II, whether in reflection from the decree *Inter Mirifica* (04.12.1963) to the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II *The Rapid Progress* (24.01.2005), or in concrete pastoral initiatives, values communication in order to preach Christ. The beatification of Fr. Alberione has allowed the Christian community to see in him a modern apostle of communication, thus stimulating the desire to know better his thought and his work in the Church.

It is the responsibility of all Paulines to know well, live and promote a wide-ranging information about blessed James Alberione as a person stirred up by God, so that the ecclesial community may take up seriously communication as a **modern form of communication**.

In presenting the complexity of the figure of blessed James Alberione as an apostle of communication, **we cannot neglect**: the inseparable unity between the spirituality of Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life and the adoption of communication as an act of witness; communication understood as an authentic new form of preaching the gospel side by side with oral preaching; the certainty that we can say God using all the means of communication and, therefore, the invitation to assume them all.

3.3. The situation of Paul in prison spurs in other believers the preaching of the gospel, but "some, in truth, announce Christ due to envy and rivalry, others instead do it for love, knowing that I am here for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not from pure motives, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment" (1:15-17).

Observing the variety of preachers in the ecclesial community, Paul concludes: "What difference does it make, as long as in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed? And in that I rejoice" (1:18).

Paul uses quite different words to describe and condemn the work of other preachers: "Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil-workers! Beware of the mutilation! (...) Many, in fact, I have told you several times, and now I repeat with tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:2,18).

The preaching of the gospel can be done "out of love, envy or rivalry" and as "enemies of the cross of Christ." For the former, Paul tolerates with joy the diversity of intentions that save the final result that is at any rate praiseworthy. For the latter, Paul begs with tears that the community repel them with decision.

Reflecting on the **diversity of the witness** that we Paulines render by our initiatives in communication in the Churches of the five continents, I am convinced that we are preaching “out of love” and not for intentions that are not supernatural. The charges of commerce for desire of economic profit that sometimes they move against us, wishing that they are ever without basis, have in fact never been spared even during the times of the Founder who often repeated: “Care and vigilance will be exercised so that the apostolate may maintain itself in that pastoral loftiness that is in the letters of St. Paul. Love for Jesus Christ and for souls will make us different and separate well what is apostolate from what is industry and commerce” (in *Carissimi in San Paolo*, p. 59).

The attitude of staying in the Church “**with the spirit of Paul**” merits much prudence on our part. The life of the first Christian communities described in the *Acts of the Apostles*, the composition of the four gospels, the letters of Paul, the history of the Church Fathers and the variety of the theological schools and schools of morals and spirituality assure us that faith can be lived and expressed through various sensibilities and cultures. The true drama would be if, above all through our editorial activity, it were not possible to recognize us as Paulines or, worse, given our contradictory difference, it were simply impossible to identify us.

3.4. Although a prisoner, in writing to the Philippians Paul often and with participation manifests his **sentiments** and invites his readers to live in **joy**: “It is with great joy that I pray because of your participation in the gospel” (1:4); “I hold you in my heart” (1:7); “God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus” (1:8); “and I rejoice and continue to rejoice” (1:18); “make my joy complete” (2:2); “I rejoice and share my joy with all of you. In the same way, you too rejoice and share your joy with me” (2:17); “Rejoice in the Lord” (3:1); “Rejoice in the Lord, I repeat, rejoice. ... The Lord is near” (4:4).

Describing his condition as a prisoner who can be condemned to death, and thinking of his relationship with the Christians of

Philippi, Paul places everything in the context of joy that finds its main reason in the communication of faith. Paul is in joy because he has received “grace” from Christ and he rejoices because, due to his preaching, the Philippians are in Christ.

Applying to ourselves the experience of the sentiments that Paul shares with the Philippians, let us reflect on the **presence of all the addressees** to which our apostolate arrives with its manifold expressive forms. We cannot reduce our addressees to the simple communicative contact of “users” or to the commercial exchange of “customers.” The addressees of our apostolate, “the souls” in the teaching of the Primo Maestro, must be part of our prayer, of all the stages of Pauline formation, of adequate editorial work that takes into account the various necessities, the care for technical realization, encounter during the moment of diffusion and eternal reward.

“You, o souls that are saved by us, you are my crown (*Phil 4:1*) and my glory, St. Paul said. ... Let them look up to heaven, all those who burn for souls. ... Great is the reward that awaits them because he who shall have worked and taught will be great in the kingdom of heaven. There are many apostolates, but most important is that one that God has placed in your hands and that you have as instruments of merit and of glory: the apostolate of the press. And even in this apostolate St. Paul is a model among the apostles” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1929-1933*, p. 203).

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January 2006 – Pro manuscripto