

A presentation of

**“TO GIVE TO THE WORLD JESUS CHRIST, WAY, TRUTH AND
LIFE: THE PAULINE FAMILY UNITARY PROJECT”**

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One of the most interesting developments taking place in the Pauline Family throughout the world today is the growing awareness of being truly a family of ten institutions made up of priests, men and women religious and lay persons. More and more, we are experiencing a growing closeness and affinity not just because we can trace our origins in one common founder, Fr. James Alberione, but because we are aware of a common spiritual heritage, a common spirituality which is one and yet diversified, and a common mission. This is an awareness that has arisen quite instinctively among Paulines, perhaps through the work of the Holy Spirit. Such awareness, however, requires and deeper knowledge and understanding. In fact, it is an awareness that leads us to greater hold on the basis of our unity and communion, while at the same time it is the point of departure for having a greater confidence and firmer hold on those elements that distinguish each institution and make it unique. In effect, it is our awareness that the Pauline Family is one and yet many—unity and diversity—that has drawn us together.

As if to mark and establish this awareness of unity in diversity, last 19 March 2001, the book “*Dare al mondo Gesù Cristo, Via, Verità e Vita: Progetto unitario di Famiglia Paolina*” was published. Currently` translations in Spanish and in English are being printed.

The work of a study commission made up of representatives of the Society of St. Paul, Daughters of St. Paul, Pious Disciples of the Divine Master, Pastorelle Sisters and Apostoline Sisters, with contributions from the other Institutions, the study was initiated in 1994 but was finalized only in March 2001, after, as Fr. Gandolfo told me, a laborious struggle.

The book attempts to answer a question that aroused during the meetings of the Superiors General in 1994. The question was: “Is the Pauline Family characterized by a single charism or has it more charisms?” In other words, did Fr. Alberione found ten different institutions or only one, made up of distinct individual institutions? Is the Pauline Family as single gift of the Spirit or are ten different gifts?

The question may seem academic. In reality, however, it is a question that allows us to better know our identity within the Church and to make us better understand the presence of each institution within the Pauline Family and in the universal Church. Thus, we also become comfortable with the very newness of the Pauline Family, thus experiencing better what the Church is in her “unity and diversity.”

Immediately, let us state that the point of unity or the character that makes the Pauline Family one is effectively captured by the title of the book itself, “To give to the world, Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life.” In this statement we can identify ourselves regardless of the fact that we belong to ten distinct institutions. We also can recognize in this statement the common vision and mission that bind us together. If ever we can speak of distinction, it is mainly through the various manners we incarnate Jesus Master and the various forms of apostolate with which each institution carries out the same mission.

To clarify terms, the book explains what we mean when we say “Unitary Project.”

In the invitation for reading, Fr. Guido Gandolfo states how we should understand the phrase:

“By ‘Unitary Project’ we mean the basic idea, the inspiration that guided Fr. Alberione in giving life, under the action of the Spirit, to the Pauline Family. The term ‘Project’ has to be considered, meanwhile, not as a practical orientation (‘things’ to do or steps to take), but as a guiding vision to which constantly to refer.

“From such a ‘Project’ shall originate the plans of operation into which the Pauline Family shall want to translate concretely the unitary vision given to the Founder by God.”

“To give to the world Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life” is the base idea, the inspiration that guided Fr. Alberione to found ten institutions and is the base-idea, the inspiration that has become the main point of reference of every Pauline individual and of every Pauline community and institution. This is the “unitary project” that binds all Paulines and unifies the entire Pauline Family. The distinction and diversity of apostolates can also be viewed meaningfully from this perspective.

The two aspects of the unitary project

If we look closely at the phrase “To give to the world Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life,” we will see in it a dynamic project. By this I mean that it is not an ideal into which we fit. Instead, it is a program of life that urges us first to live Jesus Christ Way, Truth and Life and then give him to the world. Herein then is our common spirituality – to incarnate Christ – and our common mission – to give Christ to the world. In these two elements, the ten institutions of our Family find unity and communion. This is the single charism that makes the ten institutions one Family.

Obviously, we cannot give to the world Jesus Christ if he does not live in us. We cannot give him unless we know and live him. Thus follows the pre-eminence and importance of knowing and living what we now call “Pauline spirituality.”

Pauline spirituality is principally a spirituality that puts us on the path of continuing conversion, a path that our father St. Paul had embraced. As St. Paul himself would say it, our transformation or conversion consists in letting the old man born in sin die and let the new man in Christ live and reach full maturation.

It is for this reason that Fr. Alberione says in *Abundantes Divitiae* that we do not have so many devotions and practices. Our main and only devotion is “to put on Christ” or “to let Christ live in us.”

Just as in the case of St. Paul (or Fr. Alberione for that matter), the starting point of our journey to Christification does not begin with ourselves or what we have done or can do. It begins with the recognition of God’s grace, of God’s love, of God’s intervention in our lives, whereby the course of our lives is changed. In the case of St. Paul, the moment of grace was his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1-9). In the case of Fr. Alberione it was on that famous midnight that separated the two centuries (cf. AD 13-15). Consequently, also in our effort to live the Pauline spirituality, we begin by identifying in our lives a parallel experience. We try to identify that moment of grace whereby we recognize God’s hand touching us and inviting us to new life. In this we recognize our calling.

This initial experience of Grace makes us aware of the dialogical nature of Pauline Spirituality. Our transformation into Christ, in fact, is the consequence or the effect of a sustained dialogue or interaction, a living relationship between God who imparts his grace and calls and we who respond through death to sin and life in God within the context of our consecrated or dedicated lives.

What becomes the priority or central figure in this relationship is God and his loving will for us. Our devotion lies in our efforts to respond to that love and choose to do his will. Within this dialogical relationship, communion between God and us takes place and in the communion, there is transformation into Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pauline spirituality leads us to communion with the Three Divine Persons. We live Christ's life received in Baptism and embraced by faith and even on earth we become aware of our dignity as God's children, heirs of the kingdom of God in Christ.

This Trinitarian communion is the basis of our communion among ourselves and also with the rest of the God's people. We, together, thus become fully members of Christ's mystical body.

Still in a special manner, we embrace this communion with God and his people through that special calling we received, a calling that led us to consecrate our lives to God through the vows or by promises and become members of the Pauline Family.

Our religious consecration or promise, in effect, is a solemn 'yes' to God's grace and invitation that we live our lives in a sustained relationship with him and to follow Jesus Master that closely as we aim at having him be incarnated in us. Our consecration is our yes to that way of life that is characterized by the continuing conversion into Christ or by the transformation of our poor selves to that of Christ: "I live now not I but Christ lives in me. Our spiritual life consists in taking the path of Christification "until Christ is formed in us."

Transformation of the whole person

In Fr. Alberione's mind, our process of Christification consists in the transformation of our entire person. More specifically, while using Scholastic categories, he points out that the human person has three distinct faculties: the ability to know and think (mind), the freedom and capacity to make decisions and keep them (will) and the ability to love (heart). To this correspond Jesus Master's characteristics: Mind-Truth, Will-Way, Love-Life. Thus the Christification of the whole person takes place when his/her mind becomes Christ's, his/her will becomes Christ's and his/her heart becomes Christ's.

Following the dynamics of human maturation, however, it is obvious that such transformation does not take place in some magical or miraculous form (or by grace alone) or all at once. Such transformation is a process, a relationship with Christ that is sustained through life. The focal point of the relationship is the Father, in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. On our part, we allow ourselves to be transformed into Christ by our fidelity to the relationship and by the determination to do God's will in everything.

Thus it also becomes clear to us that the real path to holiness is the path of conversion, understood as the process of Christification. This is captured in one of the statements told to Fr. Alberione in one moment of revelation, which statement we now place

in our sanctuaries: “Cor contritum tenete.” This is better translated with “Follow the path of continuing conversion.”

The thought is most consoling because it does not demand of us more than who we are and what we can do. It leads us to accept ourselves for what we are and accept others for what they are while rejoicing together that we are all bound together by the same relationship with God and with the same spirit and with the same mission though with different apostolates.

Clearly now, we know that central to this journey to holiness is God’s himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has chosen to create us, love us, and manifest his will to us in our day-to-day existence. To take the journey to holiness is to enter into this love relationship God offers us.

Like Jesus Master or St. Paul or Fr. Alberione, the fulfillment of God’s will for us becomes the pre-eminent occupation and God is the summary and central Significant Other of our lives.

Thus we overcome the all-too-common belief that holiness is an ideal picture of ourselves to which we fit. This common belief does not place God at the center of our lives but still ourselves. When we do not feel we fit into the ideal, we become guilty and we seek divine assistance from God, Jesus, Mary, the saints as if these were standing by our sides in our efforts to fit our ideal image...

Perhaps, we wonder now how we can relate our mission, our specific apostolates, to this spirituality.

Let us immediately state that when we speak of the will of God, we know that it is not something abstract and outside our day-to-day experience. On the other hand, we cannot speak about the will of God outside the context of real, day-to-day life.

We believe that the Jesus we believe in and worship is the Risen Jesus, He who was incarnate in some specific period of time but one who has risen from the dead and who has sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day. The Spirit now dwells not just in us but in the midst of us: “When two or three of you agree and are gathered together, I will be in the midst of you.”

In a symbolic manner and yet very real, too, we experience His presence in the Eucharist, in the communion of hearts and minds, as well as in the love we try to achieve in our communities to which our celebration of the Eucharist leads us.

More concretely, we know the manifestations of God’s will for us in various manners.

The first means wherein we know God’s will is *life itself*. It is particularly discovered in the symmetry of events centered on the goodness and love of God. That I am a priest and a Pauline are two things that undoubtedly belong to God’s will for that is what I am now. Or if one has given birth to a child, can he or she still say that is not God’s will?

Fr. Alberione confides about his experience (AD 28-29):

“Ordinarily nature and grace worked together in such a way that one could not distinguish between them but it was always in the same direction.

For greater tranquility and trust he has to say:

1) That both the beginning and the continuation of the Pauline family always proceeded in a twofold obedience: [to] inspirations received from the Lord in the Eucharist and corroborated by his Spiritual Director, together with the express will of his ecclesiastical superiors.”

Here, we see that Fr. Alberione’s perception of God’s will remained within his real experience and not outside it. And such an inspiration was dynamic in the sense that it was not all at once but gradually as he was ready for it and as the time was ripe.

In the second place, we could say that the *Word of God* is a continuous source of knowing His will more so if we embrace that Word from day-to-day in the Eucharist and in the other liturgical celebrations, in our spiritual reading and meditation.

In fact, each day the proclamation of the Word of God is particularly addressed to us as it were the expressed call of God inviting for a response. Our response to God’s Word in our daily life shapes us to Christ, transforms our mind, our will, our heart to that of the Master. Our daily meditation and visit allow us a firmer grasp of God’s word.

Then, of course, there are the *Sacraments*. They are signs that actually confer grace. The Eucharist—Mass and Communion—and the Sacrament of Reconciliation occupy prominent places in our journey to Christification.

We cannot exclude obviously the *Magisterium* of the Church, our *Constitutions and Directories* and the *directives of Superiors* as another source of knowing God’s will. In effect it is through them that our mission and apostolate are defined and specified and given to us. It is by these that our personal charism and apostolate are given direction and means of realization. Can a person say his apostolic assignment is not the will of God when it is already obvious that assignment is what the Congregation needs and asks?

Finally, in this regard, we also can count God’s inspiration given us personally though, as Fr. Alberione indicates, this needs confirmation of our spiritual director and dependent on the directives of ecclesiastical authorities and our own superiors. Thus, it is hard to say it is God’s will for us to undertake pastoral responsibilities that are both outside the sphere of our specific apostolates and are not duly sanctioned by superiors...

So as we can see, our spirituality offers us so much space for personal discernment and response. It challenges us to be in a continuing state of contemplation of God’s presence in life, of discernment as regards his will and openness to our superiors. It also offers us a wide space where we could express our love by affirmative action of our will to what we discern is God’s will. This makes us experience much more the freedom of God’s children.

Furthermore, the dialogical aspect of our spirituality allows us a certain playfulness. By playfulness, I mean the spontaneity, less fear of committing mistakes and more space for creativity and personal initiative in our response of love to God’s love and will.

This playfulness corresponds to our being human. Thus, more easily we forgive our faults and limitations and more cheerfully do we recognize and embrace the joy of doing good as well as the pains that come from exercising our mission, things that seem to be quite neglected in other spiritualities.

The challenge to the community

Till now, I have spoken mainly on what one can do on a personal level.

Consider now the fact that each of us who recognize our common vocation as God's gift of love. Diverse and many as we are, still we are bound together by the same call – "To give to the world Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life."

In different manners, depending on the characteristic physiognomy and mission of the institution to which we belong, we live the same call translated into mission.

Our common vocation and mission is the spiritual bond that binds us to every member of the Pauline Family, to every congregation of the same family, and to the rest of the People of God. Even our personal relationships, our friendships, and our dealings with one another are based on this common vocation and mission.

While Fr. Alberione spoke of the unity of the Pauline Family, he also spoke of each one's independence as to government, administration and finances. Thus, while we treat each other justly as to finances, we cannot allow ourselves to be competitors or reduce our relations purely in terms of business. On the other hand, we try to help one another also with regards to finances and material assistance.

As a whole, Fr. Alberione envisions the Pauline Family as the microcosm as "pilot project" of what the whole Church is called to be. Bound together by the same faith and by charity, each member and each institute lives the idea of incarnating Christ by embracing the journey of conversion. Each institution strives that in this communion, the presence of Christ becomes adequately transparent and that in its apostolic endeavors, the work of redemption initiated by Christ is perpetuated. These, in fact are the elements that characterize the whole Church also in the culture of communication.

The various aspects of our life in community—governance, spiritual life, formation, the apostolate—are all geared towards the ideal we have drawn above. If we do not want to be easily carried away by fashionable trends or be discouraged by the necessary changes in our communities or become imprisoned within the immediate material preoccupations of day-to-day life, we cannot but continually confront all these to that ideal. We aim at letting Christ assume us and be himself so that we may give Him, Way, Truth, and Life to the world.

Conclusion

After all these, our conclusion may seem remote but it is not.

Down to brass tacks, as Fr. Greeley would put it, our relationship with God is experience, image and story before it is anything else and after it is everything else.

Further on, he says, "Catholicism is 'sacramentalism,' the conviction that God discloses Himself in the objects and event and persons of ordinary life."

Along this line, Jesus is the greatest of all stories and symbols in Catholicism. Mary is Queen of Apostles because she is the unique symbol not just of God's motherly love but especially as the epitome of the realization of Jesus' Incarnation not only in her womb but in her entire life. St. Paul is the greatest example and his life, the best paradigm of a

sinner who has taken the path to continuing conversion and let Christ live in him. And St. Peter is the paradigm of apostles who want to fully live Christ Shepherd. These are the main symbols and stories for our lives.

Consequently, in very livable terms, the objective of all our efforts is this: that in the life of each one of us the story of Jesus, his Gospel, is retold, is communicated, to the people of today. This means that we strive to live our lives so that the person of Jesus becomes real in the way we think, the way we exercise our will and the way we love.

We ought not be afraid if we may not reach the fullness of this ideal. In fact, we cannot and are not asked to reflect the whole of Jesus. All that is asked is that what is nature and grace in us become one and our person retells the story of Jesus also in this culture of communication.

This we can say also of each Institution of the Pauline Family. In fact, each institution has specific characteristics that reflect the whole of Jesus, indeed, but more clearly an aspect of Jesus: the SSP and the DSP reflect Jesus Truth, the PDDM, Jesus Life and the Pastorelle, Jesus Way, while the other institutions are either aggregated or joined to one Institution. While we strive to live the whole of Jesus, the focus of our apostolate is on one of the aspects of Jesus Master-Shepherd, thus complementing one another.

As a whole, it comes clear to us that we have received a very special grace through our spirituality. We are asked to have an even clearer grasp of this by knowing and striving to live this spirituality drawn from St. Paul and verbalized and lived by our common Founder. We also are challenged to venture into the spirituality by embracing even right now the path of conversion: "Until Christ is formed in you." "I live now not I but Christ lives in me."

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