

GIACCARDO AND BORELLO: A UNIQUE PRIESTHOOD

by Fr. Gabriel A. Rendón Medina

Just a few days away from celebrating the first centenary of the ordination of Blessed Timothy Giaccardo, the first Pauline priest, and in harmony with the Pauline vocational year, we are invited to revive the gift that God has given to the entire Pauline Family, to reflect, that is, on the presbyterial sense as part of our mission.

Blessed James Alberione, from the beginning of the Society of St. Paul, had the idea of forming a clerical religious congregation. One of the reasons he wanted it was the juridical aspect: in this way he could give it autonomy, since having the sacrament of Orders he was able to be part of the hierarchy in divine instruction, a privilege enjoyed by clerical congregations. Nevertheless, within the Institute clericality does not make a difference between those who have a priestly vocation and those who have that of a disciple. In expressing this idea, Fr. Alberione spoke of a quasi-priesthood for the Disciples.

He woven the sacrament of Orders with a particular connotation in the work of evangelization. While priests in general are characterized by an oral preaching, the Pauline priests would be characterized by written preaching: writing – said Fr. Alberione – is the true mission of the Pauline priest, who, incarnating Jesus Master, “will truly follow God the Writer and Publisher”.¹ This mission, however, does not fulfil it alone, it can only exist in complementarity with the Disciple. The Pauline priest without the Pauline disciple would be a simple writer, the Pauline disciple without the Pauline priest would be a simple technician, a simple worker.

Sacrament of Orders and religious consecration are two characteristics of the Society of St. Paul. Blessed Alberione did not leave a systematic doctrine on the Pauline priest or even on the relationship between the sacrament of Orders and the consecrated life. But in Trevisan heritage there is a coherent doctrine that highlights the peculiarities of the ordained ministry among the Paulines.

Fr. Alberione’s charism was born to respond to a concrete need of the time. His priestly intuition has a particular way of living pastoral charity within the Church. The presbyter of the Pauline Family finds a characteristic colouring of the paternal and maternal type which is tinged in the light of Jesus Master, the irradiation of Truth, the only Way and the only Life. The condition of *altrice* of the Society of St. Paul does not go in the sense of organization, but of relationship, as I. Iglesias states:

The relationship, anthropologically and theologically, is a problem of conversion to the other. It is to position oneself in front of the other, open to donation seen as emptying and to the

¹ RSp 82; RSP 102.

other form of donation that is the acceptance of the other. The conversion of man to God, which presupposes that of God to man, is the same. It is the only way to ensure that life, in which the Spirit works in all and for all, effectively reaches all.²

In order to reach this relationship, both anthropological and theological, the mission of the Pauline priest finds a model of life, in his *altrice* function, in the washing of the feet, because in this example and command of Jesus a new community of equals is formed, a community of service; this Gospel text was very dear to Blessed Alberione. Therefore, as Ch. Bernard affirms: “The *brothers* (disciples) and the sisters are not mere support forces, but collaborators of the priests”.³ In this way of being a family, the priestly identity of the Society of St. Paul cannot be limited to those who belong to this Congregation and have received the sacrament of Orders. It also opens up to the members of the Institute of Jesus Priest, who from their secular clerical condition collaborate, in one or another way, in being *altrice* in the Pauline Family: a light radiating with truth, because both priests and consecrated persons participate in the same charism, as stated by F. Ciardi:

Therefore, the charism is the factor around which there is unity among all the members of the community, priests and religious brothers, because they are all at the service of the same project. The presence in the Church of a priest so closely linked to a particular community charism confirms how consecrated life is rooted in it, to the point that there is no Church without the multiform expression of consecration. [...] Beyond the fact that an Institute is of a “clerical” or “lay” nature, to use the distinction enshrined in the *Code of Canon Law*, beyond the pre-eminence of the ministerial element or that of consecration, whether all its members or most of them are priests or laity, the Institutes are united by the charismatic dimension, they are the fruit and expression of a specific charism.⁴

Blessed Giaccardo, besides being a protector in paradise, is a model to be imitated by the Pauline priests, because he found in the teachings of Blessed Alberione and in the Constitutions the will of God, the spirit of the Master who is the spirit of the “house”, that is, of the Congregation. He lived a ministry like that of the divine Master, in the will of God given life among men. I want to live the life of Jesus Christ in the ministry of his beautiful qualities and personal human virtues. He was able to take on the renunciation of personal desires and defects in order to nourish himself with the Pauline charism. The Pauline priest, in reviving the gift of God, must make his own the words of Giaccardo: “to strip myself of me, in God only the trust to take possession of the spirit of the House”.⁵

² IGLESIAS, “Los presbíteros diocesanos...”, cit., 508.

³ BERNARD, *Il Dio dei mistici...*, cit., 272.

⁴ CIARDI, F., “Il ministero presbiterale a servizio del Carisma. Approfondimenti e commento all’esperienza carismatica nella Chiesa”, in: *SeChr* XXXV (2009/2), 235.

⁵ GIACCARDO, *Diario...*, cit., 221.

The Pauline priest, for juridical reasons, has the mission of exercising the service of authority, an aspect that even Blessed Giaccardo leaves as an imprint to follow:

The strong and gentle wisdom of government makes me consider: the Priests as Brothers of toil with whom to share patience and merit; the Clerics and Novices as children of charity, to be nourished with piety and study and food, and supported with discipline; the Young people as elements of choice, to be enlightened and comforted and encouraged in their lives; the Disciples as children of charity more affectionate, robust and merciful; the Sisters as devoted collaborators to assist and guide with piety, gratitude and chastity. "Vice" in the men of the Primo Maestro. "Superior" in his own personality. Fighting defects. O Divine Master, in order to be with you in the mystery of the inner government of souls and in your spirit, I need for me: to be very sincere; to receive your direct, most abundant guidance; to continue to adhere to the First Master. Not a ruler in the House, but a form of individuals and of the whole; a form that nourishes and makes virtue work; and corrects defects.⁶

The mission of Giaccardo continues to be the mission of the Pauline priest: to take and transmit the carism of Blessed Alberione; to be most faithful among the faithful because they must guide the Pauline Family in the charism entrusted to it.

Both Blessed Giaccardo and Venerable Andrea Borello have left the Pauline Family a concrete style of living the priesthood of Jesus: he who does the will of God, spreading the Gospel to the point of offering himself. Giaccardo offers his life for the root, the sap: the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master, and with them he redeems the entire tree. Borello offers his life for the complementary vocations of the Pauline priest: the Disciples of the Divine Master, and with them he redeems the Pauline priestly identity. Both were offered to the Father in 1948, they are witnesses of the charismatic unity at the service of the entire Pauline Family and of the Church: to continue in today's world the preaching begun by Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life.

⁶ GIACCARDI, T., "Dagli scritti del Servo D. T. Giaccardo", in: CENTRO ANIMATORE SPIRITUALITÀ - PIE DISCEPOLE DEL DIVIN MAESTRO, *Divin Maestro*, 24, maggio-giugno 1985.