



## PREPARATION COURSE FOR PERPETUAL PROFESSION

by James Arinze Edeh

### PREAMBLE

It is a special period of grace for us juniors participating in the Preparatory Course for Perpetual Profession (PCPP). Celebrating the 2nd International Seminar on Formation for Mission precisely in the Vocation Year of the Pauline Family is truly a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is obvious that the Holy Spirit is communicating something very important to us, that we must listen to his suggestions with open ears. Especially for we young ones who are still in initial formation, it is a great privilege to be part of this great event. It is, therefore, on this note that I, **James Arinze Edeh**, in the name of the group that is currently preparing for the definitive "Yes" to our Divine Master in the Congregation, express our profound gratitude to the Lord for the gift of the Pauline vocation. Our thanks also go to the Superior General, Don Valdir José De Castro, and his General Councilors for giving us the opportunity to be part of this historic moment of the Congregation. Above all, we thank you for having set out three intense and exclusive months of preparation for perpetual vows, as requested by the Congregation in the X General Chapter. The importance of this preparation cannot be underestimated. It is very timely, considering the fact that today's culture is breaking down the fences that once divided nations and building communicative bridges between them. It is in this context that my intervention intends to present our extraordinary experiences in the international preparation period. This is the fourth Course of Preparation for Perpetual Profession. Today the course is composed of 11 young juniors from 5 different countries: Congo, Italy, Nigeria, Philippines and Venezuela.

For us, having an international formative experience in view of perpetual vows is truly a moment of grace. This can be likened to the event of 1960, in which our beloved Founder, Blessed James Alberione, brought together a good number of his sons (the oldest) from different parts of the world to Ariccia for an intense and special course of a month of Spiritual Exercises entitled: Come to a lonely place, and rest a while. Leaving all other commitments, we too are making a historic, spiritual, community, academic and apostolic journey, specifically Pauline. Often in our provinces we learn only in a fragmented way the Pauline life, while this period allows us to make a journey to the places of our origins, especially Saint Lorenzo di Fossano, where our beloved Founder was born, and the "Mother House" in Alba. This Course also brings us closer to the Holy See to better appreciate the fourth vow we profess, that is, fidelity to the Pope and the Founder's insistence on walking with and in the Church.

## **ORIGINS: PILGRIMAGE TO THE PLACE OF OUR BIRTH**

Returning to the origins is a necessity for any institution that has survived over time and has spread to all continents and nations. This is why when the institution grows, develops and expands, meeting many other realities and struggling to assert itself, there is always a tendency to deviate from its fundamental principles. Returning to drink from the origins not only guarantees fidelity, but invigorates, renews and revitalizes. In order to take control of the present and chat a promising future, we need to withdraw from time to time to where it all started. It ushers us into the original experiences, ideas or visions of the founder while creating new insights with which to relaunch into the mission.

Therefore, international preparation for perpetual vows is very important as it is an appeal to all the young members who are about to make a life commitment in the Congregation to "return home". This home, which is located in the place where the Congregation was born, creates a sort of personal relationship between those preparing for perpetual vows and the charismatic heritage of the Congregation. It gives them the opportunity to walk on the footsteps of the Founder. Visiting Alba and Bra, special places of both the Founder and the Society of Saint Paul, offered us the opportunity to have a panoramic view of the cultural, spiritual and socio-political situation in which our Congregation was born. Walking on those sacred lands of Bra and Alba reflecting, imagining, meditating, questioning, praying, trying to assimilate and deepening the knowledge of where it all started, connecting it to how far we have gone and where we are today, automatically makes us to ask: where are we going? Those days of pilgrimage to the places of grace for the life of the Founder and of the Congregation were really strong for us. We came to understand that the future challenges are greater than those of the past. It made us even more aware that Fr. Alberione lived and has left the Congregation in our hands, to us who are preparing to commit ourselves in perpetuity to live the Charism and the Pauline Mission.

## **PAULINE CHARISM**

Our charism and our spirituality suffer from great poverty in most of our Circumscriptions due to inadequate Pauline formation. There are no member specialized in both these fields. Consequently, even among our senior members, we notice how difficult it is to translate these in the formation of young ones coming to join us. The consequence is that there is little or no Pauline color in the way that many of us are trained. This is why we young one do not know much about our Founder, and therefore we have little love for him. Since we do not know him, we do not understand the richness and beauty of our charism and spirituality. Therefore, we do not spread our spirituality that involves the whole Christ for the whole person. Furthermore, we do not encourage people to pray to Blessed James Alberione and to ask for his intercession, so that there may be witnesses leading to his canonization.

This Course offers the young generations the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and love for our Founder. Loving him we come to appreciate the beauty of our charism that he breathed in us and the rich spiritual heritage it he left us.

Our spirituality, which is so rich in content and which should be the Pauline life project from which our apostolate should flow, is often reduced to a simple slogan. The spiritual legacy that Don Alberione left us has the purpose of ushering us into a profound relationship with Jesus Master Way, Truth and Life. In this relationship we are enriched and enabled to build community relationships with our brothers, whose fruit translates into relationships in view of

the apostolic mission. Our charism therefore flows from our spirituality. It becomes a shared and expressed testimony using different means of communication, as in the case of our Mary Queen of the Apostles and of Saint Paul the Apostle.

Today's exegesis calls us to update our charisma. To this end, it is pertinent to return to the essentials, in particular for young ones still in initial formation, bearing in mind that our time is defined as a "change of age", which has no respect for the fundamentals and essential elements of cultures. In fact, it continues to disseminate information without respect for any culture, religion, morals, race, cult or belief; hence, therefore, the need for us to return to the roots, which is precisely what this phase of international preparation, aims to achieve. Apparently, the pontificate of Pope Francis continues to make us aware of the fact that "we are not in an age of change, but in a change of age". Translated thus; new technologies are rapidly and radically changing the production system and information, but always within the old consumerist paradigm. The failure to create a social structure that can benefit from these changes is one of the causes of this crisis. Faced with today's rapidly changing world, it is essential that the young Paulines be well armed with a good understanding of the Pauline charism. It is important that we try to understand the teachings of our Founder. To respond adequately to the pressing needs of the people of our time, we must return to the root. This is indeed what this intense quarterly preparation to final votes is doing.

This program seeks to provide us with the Founder's language so that we can read it in his original writings. Secondly, the experts of the Pauline charism and spirituality come to teach us and thus open us to a new and broad horizon that will allow us to evangelize in communication and communication.

## **PAULINE FAMILY**

The Society of Saint Paul is not the only foundation of our Blessed Founder. It's just a branch between ten branches. So, we were born as a family. It is very important that we not only think or feel this, but we also live it. This idea of family was very dear to Fr. Alberione, so much so that before the great spiritual exercises of 1960 in Ariccia, ('April-May 1959) he said: "We walked a lot during the 45 years (1914-1959)". Later, however, Fr. Alberione clarified that it was now necessary to walk together, in the same spirit, and no longer only as a Society of Saint Paul but as a whole Family. The course of the spiritual exercises proposed, in fact, has "another purpose", "the updating of the members to the Congregation and to the Pauline Family; and as the spiritual testament, conclusive of the mission that the Lord imposed on me ". For some of us from abroad the reality of a person founding ten institutions with the same spirit and the same charism is unthinkable. We can only imagine it. For us, therefore, the word Pauline Family was just an idea yet to be realized. However, this reality comes to light immediately upon arriving in Italy. This Course opens us to the broader picture and to the wider project of Blessed James Alberione, which is a family project. We come to realize that we are not alone making this journey, but we are born as a Family.

## **TESTIMONIES OF OUR ELDERLY**

"History is the teacher of life". The experiences of others can be useful to us; our experiences teach us more and more. Living with the most experienced and educated people, conversing with them and taking advice from them is always a beautiful experience. The wise prefer conversations, conferences, the best books. Testimonies are very important. They are

like candles burning to ward off the darkness. They ignite motivations in the heart of the listener. They are often transforming, arousing hope, challenging and giving the certainty that every mission is possible. The testimonies clarify our fears, doubts and perhaps our misconceptions. In flame the heart with zeal to go forward with faith, because if others sacrificed themselves for the mission, we too can offer our bid. Seeing with our eyes and listening to the testimonies of older brothers and sisters who have offered their lives for the Pauline Mission is a huge motivation for us young Paulines. Although most of them are already old and sick, they are still full of enthusiasm because in their suffering they are happily leaving the apostolate. From them we learn to persevere the challenges and difficulties that we may have to face for the cause of our mission. Listening to the challenges they have faced and the way they have managed the graces that Our Lord has given them, makes us understand that to stop moving forward is not an option, and that if the Lord has willed something we must make ourselves available. We are really grateful to all.

### **UNIVERSALITY (THE WORLD AS OUR PARISH)**

For us Paulines there are no limits to the distance we can travel to carry out the work of evangelization. Alberione affirms that the world is our parish; we belong to the parish of the Pope. That is, we must have our eyes on the world and be ready to Christianize it. We should be attentive to the movements of the world and be ready to respond promptly in a Christian way. We cannot be closed or self-referential, as Pope Francis says, confined to our little world or our comfort zone because the world, especially the world of today, is not closed at all. Ours is a changing era, and in which new forms of communication are breaking down those walls that hinder communications and building new ways of relating and connecting. As noted and stressed during the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Editors, being attentive to "relationship" as a key element for the practice of communication and for networking as places of meaning and content of communicative creation, the Pauline Editor must seek new forms of presence and action not so much tied to the means but rather to the culture and the new grammar of communication, being at the service of all the people of God, especially of the men and women who live in the peripherals. So communication is defined today in terms of relationship and interactivity. Communication is weighed by the number of relationships that can be created. Today "influence" is emphasized more.

An ancient proverb says: "Charity begins at home". So to be effective communicators and creators of relationships we have to start with ourselves. We create relationships within the community, between the communities, between the Provinces and the Regions and also with the General House if we want to influence today's culture. We can no longer remain confined to one place; we need Pauline brotherhood as a testimony of today's culture. This Course of Preparation for Perpetual Profession has the opportunity to be enriched with a missionary spirit, which increasingly takes on the traits of multiculturalism and mutual knowledge, to broaden horizons and build together the future of the Society of Saint Paul. It is an opening to the world and to the greatest realities. So we celebrate our spirituality, share experiences, work, study, pray, play, dream, walk and eat together, allowing us to have a great experience and friendship.

## **CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED**

Obviously the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones. The challenges are always there to build. But we must not create them. I present only two that we would like to be taken into consideration to improve the subsequent years of this course.

## **POVERTY OF THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND APPROPRIATE SPACES**

One of the challenges we are facing is that of language. As we know, language is essential for effective learning. Since this is a very short term project, we did not have much time to focus on learning the Italian language. Despite the difficulty, especially for us who come from English-speaking countries, we managed to make it. However, we appeal to Major Superiors and General Coordinators of Formation to include the learning of the Italian language in formation programs, so that young people do not come to Italy with a low level of knowledge of the Italian language.

Secondly, being in the same community with the novices is very nice as we can exchange ideas and experiences. However, it would be better if both groups could have a separate community. This would help each group enter the proper spirit required of the phase they are experiencing. To deepen the contents it is necessary that each group has its own space.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

To the extent that it is true that there is a vocational crisis in Europe and elsewhere, we must not fold our arms and do nothing. During these few months, we met some other congregations and we were amazed to see that they still have young vocations in Italy. Therefore we suggest that, perhaps, it is not enough to have a three-month preparation course; in the end the participant could celebrate perpetual vows together in any of the parishes where a bishop can be invited. This would create awareness in many young people who do not yet know the religious or priestly life. It will also create a strong spiritual bond between those preparing for perpetual profess.

## **CONCLUSION**

Approaching the end of this intensive three-month course, together with John's words in his First letter, we can say that that which we have heard, seen with our eyes, contemplated and deepened and touched with our hands are wonderfully immense, great, beautiful and worth going through. We must confess that we had an enriching moment that will remain with us all our life. We had the opportunity to realize all that the Superior General said in his homily during the opening Mass of this year's Preparation Course for Perpetual Profession. He stated that they will have the opportunity to deepen the Pauline charism, study from the original texts of the Founder to know his true thoughts, visit the Alberionian places where it all began, and above all enrich themselves with the experience of so many Pauline confreres and sisters who in these three months would share their vocational stories and provide contributions on our charism and how to interpret it in the current context of communication, to bring Christ to today's generation.

Therefore, once again we use this opportunity to thank our dear Superior General, Don Valdir José De Castro, and his Councilors, in particular Don Salud Paredes and Don Celso Godilano.

We appreciate and thank our Circumscription Superiors for their support and guidance. Words are not enough to thank all our competent and very friendly professors, who made every lesson very interesting with their love and affection. We thank all of you and pray that our Master and Lord continue to bless you with his joy. We thank Don Lomeli, who more than being our Referent became one of us, participating in all the activities and guiding us very well. Thank you Don Lomeli, may the Lord continue to bless you. We thank all those who have contributed to making our stay here in Italy blessed and comfortable, especially the chefs in all the communities where we stayed. You are all wonderful, may God bless you and your families. Finally, thanks to all the participants in the 2nd International Seminar on Pauline Formation for Mission.