



"Let yourself be transformed by renewing your way of thinking" ...in the Pauline spirituality

(don Guido Gandolfo, SSP)

There is no doubt that the theme chosen for the next General Chapter - "*Let yourselves be transformed by renewing your way of thinking*" (Rom 12:2) - is as pertinent as ever. Beyond the fruit that is desired - to become "artisans of communion to prophetically proclaim the joy of the Gospel in the culture of communication" - St. Paul's invitation is valid in every area.

As is clear, for this transformation, *metamorphosis* in the Greek text, the Apostle uses the passive form: it is therefore God who transforms us, and we are transformed! A transformation that involves first of all the mind, the way of thinking: we know very well that what dwells in our mind sooner or later passes into language and in our actions... Our Founder had understood it well, and he dedicated a special booklet to the theme of the sanctification of the mind, frequently reiterating that the first homage to God takes place in the mind: "the mind comes first"!

How can we apply to our spirituality the invitation of the Apostle?

First of all, by seeking to know, deepen, learn and assimilate the spiritual-apostolic project handed over to us by the Founder. We find a wonderful synthesis in *Abundantes Divitiae*, in the chapter entitled "Pauline Spirit" (AD 93-100). Here it is enough for us to focus our attention on the following expression:

"We seek life *IN Christ the Master*" (AD 94).

This brief indication of the Founder is extraordinarily rich in content and applications. It is what Fr. Alberione was most interested in, and it is the centre of our spirituality: to live-in-Christ, to make Christ Jesus live in the whole person, so that Jesus himself is the subject of our thoughts, our desires, and our actions. And we are an extension of Him in us!

The secret and essence of the journey is the profound encounter with Christ: the *whole* Christ, the Master Truth and Way and Life, the complete Christ who "renews" the person.

Fr. Alberione presents this dynamism with the concept of the *Incarnation* of Jesus Christ in the soul. Similarly to what happened in Mary, Christ mystically *takes flesh* in the believer at the moment of baptism by the Holy Spirit. The itinerary of sanctification consists in allowing the Spirit to make Christ Jesus *Incarnate* grow in the whole person: the result will be "the new man", the man who has by now abandoned the parameters of thought, judgment, and behaviour that are merely human and who is gradually allowing the Divine Master to "take form" in him.

The progressive growth of the Person of Jesus "incarnate" in a soul tends to constitute a new being: the egoistic component decreases; the circulation of divine sap increases; the person begins to think, will, and love like Jesus. And good, Christian, apostolic fruits are matured.

For Blessed Alberione, as we all know, Jesus who lives in us is the Master, the "perfect" Master: Truth, Way, Life.

1. In the first place, then, the journey of configuration to the Master the Truth.

Jesus has revealed Himself as the Truth: not *a* truth, but *the* truth, the one, eternal, immutable truth. He came to make known to us "the truth about the nature of man and his destiny": only he, the revelation of the Father's thought, can reveal to us the wonderful destiny that awaits us.

What applications for the believer?

We are called to "follow" this Master: it is not enough, therefore, to *know* his teaching. In fact, he is the "supreme" Master, and therefore *unique* among a multitude of pseudo-masters: his magisterium is not indoctrination, that is, it is not limited to transmitting knowledge, but "educates", makes the disciple grow; his, in fact, is "the most beautiful educational method".

But God's gift does not stop there. Since "following" the Master is a commitment beyond our strength, together with knowledge, the Master will give "the grace to do what he teaches"! Therefore, the steps are clear: it is essential to *know* what Jesus teaches; and then "to *do*" what He proposes; in order to do this, the Lord does not fail to give the help of *grace*. It is not difficult to see here the *whole* Christ Jesus: the Truth that teaches; the Way that leads the Pauline to "do"; the Life that assures grace.

And how Fr. Alberione concludes is extremely important: "*we will please the Father for the life of the mind*". A typical underlining of Fr. Alberione, which still recalls the importance that he attributes to the role of the mind! In order to please the Heavenly Father, according to the Founder, a serious commitment to prayer and also a sustained dedication to the apostolate are not enough: it is indispensable, in the first place, to increase the *life* of the mind. With readings, reflections, insights that allow us to acquire the very mentality of Jesus!

This conformation of the mind is nourished through the dynamism of the *Word of God*, to be known and assimilated through "intelligent" (= *intus-legere*), adoring, contemplative reading; and through daily meditation, lived according to the Pauline method.

The person is invited to put himself and remain in the school of Jesus *Truth*. The Master Truth reaches, enlightens, and fills the *intelligence*: according to Fr. Alberione, the "first homage" is to open the mind to attentive and loving listening.

2. At this point the passage from Christian mentality to Christian *life* is consequential.

It is the phase of conformation to the Master Way. The person who intends to live-in-Jesus begins to make the same choices as Jesus and to act just like Him: it will be Jesus himself who will lead the believer to seek the divine will in all things!

All this requires of the Pauline to pause for a long time in "contemplation" (this is the term indicated by the Founder) on Jesus captured in the different aspects of his earthly life: the crib and early childhood, private life and entrance to public life. In this continuous encounter, each person discovers to which Jesus one has to be transformed: in Jesus-poor, in Jesus-meek, in Jesus-obedient, in Jesus who seeks only the glory of the Father, etc..

In this phase, the daily examination of conscience during the visit and the periodic recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation are fundamental.

3. In order that all this may be fully realized in us, here is the phase of conformation to the Master Life. Jesus Life challenges and touches the Pauline in his most important part: the *heart*. Consequence: the need to be "*imbued*" with grace, which is sanctifying and life-giving.

The whole movement begins and develops from the gift of grace, which Christ Jesus earned for us with his passion. Here the context is decidedly sacramental: in fact, Jesus-Life communicates grace "in baptism, he strengthens it in confirmation, nourishes it in the Eucharist, repairs it in confession, purifies it in extreme unction" (DF p. 55). The sacrament in which our encounter with Jesus-life takes place most vitally and frequently is the sacrament of the Eucharist: to the point that the expression Jesus-life in Fr Alberione is practically synonymous with the Eucharistic Jesus. It is precisely from the Eucharistic Jesus that the flow of vitality that is destined to create full *conformation* to him is poured out on the believer every day.

Because of the fact that it is "born of the Eucharist" the Pauline Family has taken life and consistency from the Tabernacle, and its spirituality must be qualified by a prayer *centred on the Eucharist*.

This Eucharistic spirituality draws from two fundamental sources:

- The first is the *daily Eucharistic celebration*. The call to the *centrality* of the Eucharistic celebration and the invitation to make the whole day a *Eucharistic day* were continuous exhortations of Fr Alberione.
- The second is the *Eucharistic Visit*, understood as the Eucharist adored and as daily *class time* at the feet of the Divine Master. The visit is considered a "characteristic of Pauline piety", a privileged place of encounter with Christ: "It is an encounter of the soul and of our whole being with Jesus... It is the friend who goes to the true Friend...".

Therefore, here is the combination of certain spiritual-Apostolic effectiveness: *Eucharist-Bible*: "Eucharist and Bible - says the Founder - form the apostle of the press. Let these two things be inseparable and inseparable in your hearts".

Can this demanding journey of conformation to Jesus Master be accused of spiritualism or intimism? In no way!

The Jesus who lives in the Pauline is the Apostle of the Father, he is always engaged in evangelisation, and he works and urges man to work not only for Him but in Him! Indeed, from Fr Alberione's perspective, it is Jesus himself who carries out the apostolate within us!

Never forget that our sanctification is apostolic! It is born and nourished in prayer (in all its manifestations); but it manifests itself, develops and grows in apostolic activity. It is on this ground that the Founder can urge us to desire that the hours of the apostolate - "our varied and daily toil" - become actually a "homage of adoration". And it is still under this condition that he comes to "experience" our works as no less than "divine works"!