

THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ALBERIONE IN THE LIFE AND APOSTOLATE OF GABRIELINI

There is no doubt that Blessed James Alberione was a man who personally *lived* an intense *spiritual life*, in a very strong relationship with God in Christ under the motion of the Holy Spirit. And what he first experienced, he gave to all his sons and daughters: a rich patrimony of spiritual-Apostolic life, expressed in organic synthesis of contents and modalities that allow them to walk, with fruit and speed, the paths of sanctification.

Fr Alberione invariably stressed that the Pauline Family has only one spirituality: “living the Gospel”, “living the Gospel in its entirety”, “living the Gospel as Saint Paul interpreted it”. And he specified that living the Gospel means living the Christ Jesus, the complete Christ as he revealed himself, Way and Truth and Life; or living in Christ, in the integral Divine Master.

We can try to enter into the main lines of Fr Alberione’s spirituality by using the synthesis that he himself left in *Abundantes divitiæ gratiæ suæ* (AD), a text that the Pauline Family considers as its own “charismatic history”:

“The Pauline Family aspires to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life, in the spirit of Saint Paul, under the gaze of Mary Queen of the Apostles.

In it there are not many particularities, nor singular devotions, nor excessive formalities, but life is sought in Christ the Master and the Church. The spirit of Saint Paul is revealed in his life, in his letters, in his apostolate. He is always alive in dogmatics, in morals, in worship, in the organization of the Church.

The secret of greatness is to model oneself on God, living in Christ. Therefore, the thought of living and working in the Church and for the Church is always clear; of inserting oneself like wild olive trees in the vital olive, Christ the Eucharist; of thinking and nourishing oneself with every phrase of the Gospel, according to the spirit of Saint Paul. (...).

The whole man in Jesus Christ, for a total love of God: intelligence, will, heart, physical strength. Everything: nature, grace, the vocation for the apostolate. A wagon running on four wheels: holiness, study, apostolate, poverty” (AD 93-100).

This passage clearly highlights the essential traits of Fr Alberione’s spirituality:

- *a climate of life: to be and live in Christ;*
- *a way of being before the Lord: being nourished by “every phrase” of the Christ-Word and deriving everything from the Eucharistic Christ;*
- *a bright horizon: everything starts from the Trinity and everything returns to the Trinity;*
- *a way: discipleship, which extends to all the faculties of the person and all his activities;*

- *a clear awareness of the mission: everything: nature, grace, the vocation for the apostolate;*
- *one norm: to live and work in the Church;*
- *the models of discipleship: Mary Queen of Apostles and St. Paul the Apostle.*

● ***“One seeks life IN CHRIST THE MASTER”.***

The secret and synthesis of the journey is the qualified encounter with Christ: the whole Christ, the Master-Good Shepherd Way and Truth and Life, the complete Christ who “restores” the person.

Fr Alberione presents this dynamism with the imagery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the soul. Just as it happened in Mary, Christ is mystically incarnated by the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believer at the moment of baptism. The itinerary of sanctification consists in allowing the Holy Spirit to make Christ Jesus incarnate in the person, to the point of appropriating more and more of the whole being: the result will be “the new man”, the man who has by now abandoned the parameters of thought, judgement, behaviour that are only human or instinctive, and who is gradually allowing the Divine Master to “take shape” 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, want, love like Jesus. And they grow as good Christian

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Animated by the living desire to conform to Jesus, he would like to implement the following orientation of the Founder: “I believe that in Secular Institutes many souls will ascend to the altars. Humble souls, souls who are not even externally recognized as persons consecrated to God because they have no particular habit, because they live a life similar to that of civilians. But, underneath it all, that heart pleases God, and God dwells in that heart. So for the entrance, the conditions are these: to have this intense love of God and this love for souls. Then one will do the apostolate in one way and one in another; however, the consecrated life is all for the Lord, for souls, one will work and put the intention for souls; one will offer everything with Jesus crucified, one will give a good example and this will make the fragrance of Christ spread around. Let there be this intention” (MCS, 60).

“Holiness is in the heart! [...] I do not commit you to any particular sacrifice, because our penances are three: charity, that is, to love one another very much; obedience to people in authority; work of the apostolate. There are no penances, neither of the Cilicians nor of particular harshness. There is the apostolate and the penance that our Lord has given: you will eat bread with the sweat of your brow” (MCS 64-65).

● “To live the whole of **the Gospel**” and “to be inserted like wild olive trees in the vital olive, **EUCCHARISTIC CHRIST**”.

Life in Christ is nourished through a double dynamism:

- the dynamism of the Word of God, to be known and assimilated with an “intelligent” (= inside-light), adoring, contemplative reading.

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

- the dynamism of *the Eucharist*. “The whole life of the Pauline Family came from the Eucharist,” the Founder often repeated.

Because of the fact that it was “born of the Eucharist” the Pauline Family took life and consistency at the Tabernacle, and its spirituality must be qualified by a prayer *centered in 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 in Fr Alberione.

The second is the *Eucharistic Visit*, understood as the Eucharist adored and as daily *school* time at the feet of the Divine Master. The Visitation is felt like a “characteristic of Pauline piety”, a qualified place of the 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 binomial of certain spiritual apostolic effectiveness: *Eucharist-Bible*: “Eucharist and Bible form the apostle of the press. Let these two things be inseparable and inseparable in your hearts”.

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He will nourish himself every day with the Word of God, well convinced of what the Founder says: “It is also necessary... the study of Holy Scripture: for it is the most beautiful book of God! It is up to other books like the sun to the firefly, like the Eucharist to an image of Jesus, because it is the word that attracts the most attention and is most effective in preaching; because if one reads at least a few verses every day, he will take on the spirit of judging more supernaturally than human things” (ATP²:56).

“You will say that the gospel is difficult. No, it is not, because the Lord has done it for our heads, just as He has done the bread for our stomachs. Just as the Eucharist has made the bread of our souls, so has the gospel which is the bread of the heart. Without Sacred Scripture you will always be disorientated: it would be as if those nuns destined for the choir did not go there. This is not one of those things that are said in bulk and then can be done and not done; you must make a law out of it” (1933, *Unpublished Sermons*, 28).

The Gabrielini would devote abundant time to personal prayer until he becomes a “walking prayer”: “Pray a lot! It will be said that there is no time, but then you must convert all your time into prayer. There are souls who are like walking, walking prayer. They do things at home, outside the home, at the establishment, or in the church; but whatever they do for God, united in spirit to the Masses that are celebrated on earth, always offering themselves with Jesus Host. Then we don’t have to complain anymore, the time to pray is there; there are the 24 hours of the day; even sleeping, because in the evening it is put the intention that all the breaths are changed into acts of God’s love, and all the heartbeats that occur during sleep are acts of God’s love. Then everything happens in the fulfillment of God’s will. In the evening, the Lord is asked to prepare the graces for the next day and to send many souls to heaven for their eternal rest while they rest. There are souls who aim to give Paradise to at least one soul in the day and to free at least one soul from Purgatory. This is how the apostolate is done, and there are also results. Sometimes, however, it seems that the apostolate has the opposite effect, or at least that it does not give visible results. When, however, one continues to pray, the result will always be there even if it seems that the opposite effect is obtained. It is then God who works, and “if God is with us, who will be against us?” (Rom 8:31). And if God is with us, what can we not expect from God? There are souls who are victimised, who don’t understand God’s righteousness; souls who can only think of good; souls who keep in habitual contact with God wherever they are: on the train, in the bus, while they cook or govern, and so on. In everything they do there is union with God, which will be more or less felt, but which little by little will become more and more felt and will make the soul more and more joyful, because it will feel its union with the Lord more and more alive” (MCS 56-57).

● **“Whole man in Christ...: INTELLIGENCE, VOLUNTARY, HEART, PHYSICAL STRENGTHS.”**

Fr Alberione always kept in mind the *integrity of the person*: “The whole man in Christ”. Christ enters into the whole person and informs all aspects of the person: faculties, abilities, industriousness, historical realities, social reality...

If grace presupposes nature, it is necessary that Christian life and human life harmonize in the best way possible. The “Pauline method” which applies the *whole* of Christ, Truth, Way, and Life, to the whole man, seen in his components of mind, will, heart and body, contributes admirably to this.

“All man in Christ for a total LOVE FOR GOD”.

Christ Jesus is always oriented to the Father and moved by the Holy Spirit. Hence the bright *Trinitarian horizon* that qualifies the spirituality of Fr Alberione.

It is an aspect on which Fr Alberione wanted to place special emphasis. The same statement “Christ the Way, Truth, and Life” can only be read deeply in the Trinitarian sense.

Therefore, through the work of Jesus, the person regains the beauty and luminosity conferred on him by the three Divine Persons; indeed an even better “edition” derives from it:

“the sacred image of man is mended in the Son of God, and will surpass in beauty for the Holy Spirit, through superabundance of grace” (*Donec formetur Christus in vobis*, 35-36).

“Everything: nature, grace, vocation, FOR THE APOSTOLATE”.

The “total love for God” contains an “irrepressible missionary tension” (VC 77): *all and everything for the mission*.

It is the spontaneous consequence and at the same time the necessary explanation of the Eucharistic dimension. Assiduous communion with the Christ who gives himself transfuses into the believer the style of the Shepherd who “is moved” by the crowd (“sheep without a shepherd”) and who, as the first act of his intervention, begins to “teach them many things” (cf. Mk 6:34). Hence the strong *pastoral affluence* that characterized Fr Alberione’s teaching from the beginning and the activity of the whole Pauline Family.

The apostolic impulse is, therefore, an indispensable characteristic of the Pauline Family. The Christ Jesus who chooses, who calls to Himself, who introduces in His intimacy urges us *to give Him to today’s world* with all the potential available today. The spiritual life itself has as its spontaneous result the apostolic proclamation, so much so that it can be affirmed that the mission is the same way to sanctification.

In the Founder’s thought, every member of the Pauline Family must know no limits to zeal: considering the inestimable benefits of God’s advances in art, science and the very technical perfection and human industry, he “bends” them to make them effective instruments of the apostolate. An apostolate that requires “breadth of doctrine, of influence, of grace; continuity of work; the intensity of zeal, of sacrifice; the fervent spirit of prayer.

“Let us consider the Pauline Family,” sums up Fr Alberione, “as a complex of apostolic souls who give of themselves and use all their strength for men. Let us say at the end of life: I have spared nothing for them: neither time, nor health, nor ingenuity, nor comfort; I have spared nothing for souls, nothing”. (*Sermons*, 1957, p.141).

In the thought of Fr Alberione, the apostolate should not be understood as what we work for the Lord, but what the Lord Jesus, the working subject, accomplishes by using us and our means.

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Driven by the love of God who dwells in him, he will commit himself, by all possible means, to making a gift to others of what he has received: “The Institute of Saint Gabriel takes its name from Saint Gabriel the Archangel because it wants to form and initiate its members into an apostolic life of penetration; to profess in the midst of the world total consecration to the Lord with full dedication to the apostolate: to serve and cooperate with the Church in giving to humanity Jesus Christ, Master, Way, Truth and Life, with the spread of Christian thought, Christian morality and means of elevating individual and social life, particularly in modern forms. Everyone can continue the system of life that occupies where he is. The special purpose of the

Saint Gabriel Institute, in fact, is such that it can be zealous in any place. Therefore, professionals, employees, those who occupy important positions in society, can continue to carry out their work, indeed in certain circumstances it is good for them to stay where they are. The word of God, in fact, is free from all bonds and can penetrate everywhere, in very different forms" (*Dearly beloved in Saint Paul*, 1302-1303).

"Today in all nations, the Catholic-inspired laity is in great movement: national and international congresses, conferences, study weeks, rallies, position papers, direct or indirect contact with the Catholic hierarchy, all indicate the need for new ways to save humanity from materialism, atheism and the remnants of Masonic anticlericalism. On the other hand, there are young men and women who want to wait for their own sanctification in a stable life, organized religiously and guided by obedience, without entering the life of traditional Institutes" (*Saint Paul*, April 1958).

● "Therefore, always clear the thought of living and working **IN THE CHURCH and FOR THE CHURCH**".

The absolute necessity of coupling spirituality with the Church, in the whole ecclesial body, was another of the aspects most reiterated by Fr Alberione.

"Let us have children's hearts towards Her [the Church], who has a Mother's heart for us: being born from the sleeping Heart of Jesus the sleep of death on the Cross. The Church for us is not just any faction: but the one, holy, Catholic, apostolic, Roman Church: indefectible, infallible, visible, instituted by Jesus Christ".

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He understood well the Founder's word: "Christian perfection can also be achieved in the world. One should not think that it is only in convents, monasteries, that one expects to perfect oneself in virtues and to achieve a distinct holiness. There are people who live in the world and make more sacrifices than we do; there are people who live by God, live in total dependence on God's will and, at the same time, groan about the evils present in humanity, make reparation for the sins committed against God, against Jesus Christ, and zeal for God's honor, the good of souls and love for the Catholic Church. It is not because we are in a state of perfection that we are perfect. The state is one thing, the perfection of the soul is another. And we are perfect because there is depth of faith, there is depth of love for God and souls and there is a firm hope in future goods, a firm love for spiritual goods, a serene trust in God's grace to correspond to our special vocation" (2 June 1958, *To the Pious Disciples* III, 180s).

● Finally, here are the **EXCELLENT MODELS** which the Pauline Family wants to inspire.

"Under the gaze of MARY QUEEN OF THE APOSTLES".

Mary Most Holy, venerated as Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Good Shepherd, is the first guide and model given us by the Father to lead us to Jesus. Fr Alberione recalls that

the first devotion to Mary was that of Jesus who honoured her as Mother; and that the second devotion to Mary was that of the Apostles who loved, venerated and imitated her... Therefore, Mary should be welcomed as the trainer of the apostle of all times and places.

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He nurtured a deep attachment to Mary: *“The Angel announces, Mary welcomes. Saint Gabriel the Archangel is the announcer and is called the Angel of Redemption and Incarnation. Mary represents humanity that accepts. Thus, is represented the Church that announces and communicates the fruits of the Redemption and at the same time is represented who accepts this announcement (To the Daughters of St. Paul, July 30, 1958)”*.

“In the spirit of ST. PAUL”.

A luminous interpreter of this spirit is **St. Paul**. The apostle par excellence excited Fr Alberione especially for two reasons:

- spiritual depth: a man “firmly established” in Christ Jesus, who became a unique point of reference and the driving force of his whole being (Phil 1:21);
- the irrepressible apostolic impulse: to generate men in Christ. Hence the vocation of the Pauline Family all oriented towards mission.

To be inspired by Saint Paul therefore means to make our own, assuming them in a full and active way, the strongest yearnings - the “great loves” as they are called - of the Apostle: Christ Jesus (“my Lord”, Phil 3:8) and the brothers/sisters to whom we are sent, with his same *universal horizon*.

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In accordance with the Founder’s delivery, he too intends to be “Saint Paul living today”: “If Saint Paul lived, he would continue to burn with that double flame, with the same fire, zeal for God and his Christ, and the people of every country. And in order to be heard he would ascend to the highest pulpits and multiply his word by the means of current progress: press, film, radio, television. It would not be his cold and abstract doctrine. When he would arrive, he would not appear for an occasional conference: but he *would stop and form*: to obtain the consent of the intellect, to persuade, to convert, to unite with Christ, to begin a fully Christian life. He would only leave when there was the moral certainty of perseverance in his own. He left the priests to continue his work; he often returned there with his word and writing; he wanted news, he was with them in spirit, he prayed for them.

He said to the Paulines: Know, love, follow the Divine Master Jesus. “Be my imitators as I am of Christ” [1 Cor 11:1]. This invitation is a general one, for all his faithful and devotees. For us there is more, since we are children. Children have life from their father; therefore, to live in him, from him, for him, to live Jesus Christ. For us the words to his sons of Thessalonica, to whom he reminds them that he made himself for them, are *appropriate*: “to give you ourselves as an

example to imitate” [2 Th 3:9].¹ Jesus Christ is the perfect original; Paul was made and shaped for us; so that in him we may be forged, to reproduce Jesus Christ. Saint Pauls form is not for a physical reproduction of bodily features, but to communicate his personality to us to the maximum: mentality, virtue, zeal, piety... everything. Let the Pauline family, composed of many members, be Paul living in a social body.

To know and meditate on St. Paul in life, works, letters; to think, reason, speak, work according to him; and to invoke his paternal assistance” (*St. Paul*, October 1954).

But the “Pauline” would be incomplete (or even misleading) if he did not take into due account the presence of **Peter**, with the consequent “feel with the Church”, so inculcated by Fr Alberione.

Therefore, the Pauline Family will want to keep faithful to the path that Fr Alberione pointed out to it with such clarity and strength: “This is the path traced to the Paulines: always disciples of the Master; always living the Master; always feeling the Master; always revealing the Master. With the Master and in dependence on the Master they will be masters of knowledge, of perfection, of life” (*Fr Alberione, Presentation*, in: DRAGONE C.T., “Maestro Via Verità e Vita”, vol I, p 5-6, 1961).

This is the horizon, this is the goal: apostolic holiness!

Guido Gandolfo, ssp

¹ Nel testo citato dalla Vulgata: «*ut nosmet ipsos formam daremus vobis...*».