

The Institute of Annunciation (Annunciatine) History and Spirituality

The Institute Maria Santissima Annunziata (IMSA), closely linked to the mystery of the Annunciation from which it takes its name, is one of the four Pauline Institutes of Secular Consecrated Life Aggregated to the Society of St. Paul. The Annunciatine, *women consecrated to God through the profession of the Evangelical Counsels*, belong to the Institute: they live their consecration in the world, among the people with whom they share anxieties, joys, difficulties and worries. Their mission is to live Jesus and proclaim the Gospel and the Divine Master in the various social spheres in which they are inserted, according to the spirit and apostolate of the Society of St. Paul and the Pauline Family.

The beginnings

Like all the institutions founded by Fr Alberione, the Institute Maria Santissima Annunziata has its roots in the “night of light” that Fr Alberione experienced at the dawn of the 20th century during Eucharistic adoration. “You were born of the Host” Fr Alberione repeated many times to his sons and daughters during the long years of his life. On that night of grace, the Institute and the whole Pauline Family was born. It is also interesting to observe how Fr Alberione, said practically to all the women’s foundations, that the book “The woman associated with priestly zeal” he wrote for them... even if they were founded many years later.

That’s why it would be interesting to investigate also the prehistory of the Pauline Institutes of secular life. It would be necessary to search among the most sensitive souls of cooperators, it is known that many made “private vows” with Fr Alberione, (some then at the end of their lives, as Fr Fedele Molino told me of two of his aunts, lived with the Daughters of St Paul in Alba in dwellings for them). He certainly didn’t want to make a third-order or oblates, otherwise, he would have done so long before. When the legal form that he considered most suitable for what Fr Alberione intended appeared ... the story began.

For the Annunciatine the legal beginning dates back to **August 15, 1958** with the entry of 12 girls (10 in Novitiate and 2 in Postulancy) during the course of exercises held in Balsamo (Milan) and preached by Blessed James Alberione. The course was preceded by a day of retreat on July 20, 1958 in Balsamo in the “Divine Master House” of the Disciples. The meeting, organized by Fr. Carlo Stella, Fr. Alberione, Sr. Felicina Luci (FSP) and Sr. Francisca Marcheggiani (PD), was aimed at presenting the nascent Institute to the girls that Fr. Stella followed in spiritual direction. Most of those young girls, already consecrated to God in a private way, will enter the Institute.

Until August 1959 Fr Alberione took direct care of the Institute, with the help of **Sr Felicina Luci**. But the Founder had called the Sister to collaborate with the newborn already on April 4, 1958. Sr. Felicina dedicated herself totally to the Institute for 18 years until 1976.

The Primo Maestro personally animated many of the Exercise courses in Ariccia and Turin. His meditations, spiritual patrimony of the Annunciatine, have been collected in the texts: *Meditations for Secular Consecrated Persons* Vol. I (1976) and Vol. II (2013) [initials: MCS and

MCS2]. There we can find his thoughts on how the spiritual life of the nascent Institute should be and what it should be like. It should be kept in mind that the Gabriellini were also present at various courses.

In November 1958 the first issue of the internal circular of the Institute edited by Sister Felicina, entitled "SS. Annunziata". Internal Circular of the Annunciatine, which in 1962 took the name of "Secular Institutes" and in January 1963 that of "Be Perfect".

The Primo Maestro entrusted the leadership of the Institutes to **Fr. Amorth in August 1959**. He was entrusted with the Gabriellini, the Annunciatine (already existing) and the urgency to start the Institute Jesus Priest. Fr Alberione repeatedly asked Fr Amorth to start an institute for spouses, but Fr Amorth always replied that he could not do it. As the number of members grew I left the Gabriellini, and then also the Institute Jesus Priest. Fr Amorth and Sister Felicina immediately began to travel around Italy to make it known. The response was surprising. In 1959, 29 novices and 37 postulants entered the retreat.

In December 1959, with the title of "Istituto Maria SS. Annunziata", a first draft of the Statute of the Institute arrived. In that year the Founder wanted the experience of a group of Annunciatine with a common life to begin in Turin at SAIE. They worked as employees of the Publishing House and were prepared for the "government" of the Institute, accompanied by the Apostoline Sr. Ignazia Mercuri and Sr. Maddalena Verani. The group, carefully followed by Don Alberione and some Pauline priests, was then dissolved in 1970. The possibility of common life remains in the Statute.

On 8 April 1960 with a decree signed by Card. Valerio Valeri, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, the Holy See approved "The Pauline Association for Priests, Men and Women", divided into three sections, as "own work" of the Pious Society of St. Paul and approved its statutes for a decade.

The Annunciatine sisters grew in number and Fr Amorth and Sister Felicina tried to give a structure to the Institute. In 1965 (2-3 January) the first National Conference was organized in Rome with the presence of Fr Alberione, Fr Amorth, Sister Felicina and 33 Annunciatine. At the end of 1965, the Institute was now structured: the Annunciatine were divided into 29 groups and with their own delegate (Siate Perfetti, Oct. 1965, p.10).

The Monthly Retreats and the Spiritual Exercises were, and still are, the most significant moments of their formation in which they grew in the knowledge of their vocation-mission and in the sense of belonging to the Institute and to the Pauline Family. The gratitude of the Annunciations is great for the good that Fr. Amorth did to the Institute in the 17 years he was at the head of the Institute, took it from the hands of the Founder in 1959 with the presence of a few young people, accompanied and formed it until 1976 leaving it with over 350 members.

The number of the Annunciatine has always been growing until 1990 with 412 members. In the following years the decline began due to the decrease in vocations and the death of the older ones. After Fr Amorth, the mandate of the Delegates of the Annunciations ended: Fr Tarcisio Righettini (1976-1992); Fr Antonio Castelli (1992-2005); Fr Vito Spagnolo (2005-2017).

Spirituality and Mission specific to the Institute

By the will of the Founder, the ten institutions that make up the Pauline Family, although they are specific to each one, are united by a “unitary project” of spirituality and mission. He thought of them as “one body in Christ and in Ecclesia”.

This body has **Common origin**: The Tabernacle - “You were born of the Host”. **Common spirituality**: “To live the Gospel in its entirety, to live in the Divine Master inasmuch as he is Way, Truth, and Life; to live it as his disciple St. Paul understood it, in the atmosphere of the Queen of Apostles”. **Common mission**: “To give Jesus Christ the Way, Truth and Life to all with all the means that progress and technology offer”.

The Institute, therefore, has the same spirituality and charism as the Pauline Family, but just as in the body each member has his own task, so each Institute has its own identity and specificity.

The Primo Maestro in a meditation of the first course of Exercises held in Balsamo in 1958, summarizes in this way, at the first Annunciations, their vocation-mission: “Spending one’s life for the Divine Master...souls who burn with love for God and who translate their life into an apostolate. ...How many can apostolates be? Innumerable; how many are the needs that arise in the Church”.

And a year later in a course of spiritual exercises held always in Balsamo he explained to the Annunziatine of the first hour their specific identity within the Church and the Pauline Family, with these words: “Why call yourself Annunziatine? Does this name have a reason? It is not by chance. The fact of the Annunciation and, therefore, of the Incarnation of the Son of God when Mary said: “Fiat mihi secundum Verbum tuum”, is the greatest fact in history because then begins our redemption ... Therefore, Annunziatine means to be in the center of history and in the beginning of redemption. It is the most beautiful name” (MCS p. 180).

Each Institute of the Pauline Family has its own specific identity that is evident from the name that identifies and characterizes it. The Institute of Mary Most Holy Annunciation, closely united to the mystery of the Annunciation and the Incarnation of the Son of God, has in this mystery the secret of its identity and mission which the Founder summarizes in two fundamental points:

1) Virginité and spiritual motherhood: “here is the great sign of the love that the Lord has for you. Blessed James Alberione, associating the Annunziatine with the mystery of the Annunciation, is as if he wanted to deliver them to the heart of the Virgin Annunciation, to learn directly from her to live virginité for the Kingdom and spiritual motherhood. In the footsteps of Mary Annunziata, the Annunziatine women welcome Jesus in themselves and give him to where they live and work. Called to be “Imitators of Mary and witnesses of the mystery of the Annunciation in the present day of the Church” (Fr Tonni Presentation Statute of 1977), the Annunziatine women live their consecration to the Lord in secularity, without anything externally distinguishing them from ordinary people, but with the passion in their hearts to bring Jesus and his Gospel where they live and work.

2) The second sign of the great love that the Lord has for you is that you can exercise all possible apostolates adapted to your particular conditions... (Fr Tonni Presentation Statute of

1977). All the apostolates... but with a mother's heart. In whatever environment they work, whether they occupy positions of responsibility or do humble and hidden work, the Annunciatine try to bring Jesus Way, Truth, and Life, the only Master and the only salvation for mankind, everywhere and bring him united to Mary.

The most powerful and effective means of the Annunciation, the one that arrives where no technique can arrive, is to announce Christ Jesus with the heart of a mother, Mary's woven heart, and to indicate the easiest and safest way to reach God, the way that Jesus himself chose to come to us: his Mother.

The life of the Annunciation is like an extension of Mary's "yes" in today's Church. It is a marvelous vocation and very timely in our society, which seems to have chosen to do without God. But it is not easy to live and work in the world without allowing oneself to be "shackled" by the world.

It is only possible if we live in continuous union with Jesus Master and Lord of life so that He is the centre of every thought, every desire, every activity. To walk every day under the guidance of Mary Mother and Teacher and Queen towards the goal that the Founder indicated to his sons and daughters in order to reach the "It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me. And so to be part of that "new host of apostles" that Fr. Alberione "saw" on the famous night of light: apostles who would feel what he felt.

SAMPLE TEXTS WITH COMMENTARY

In order to define the life and spirituality of an Annunciation according to the Primo Maestro, I believe that the best thing to do is to present some passages of the Primo Maestro commenting on them, without claiming to be exhaustive.

HOW THE "SECULAR INSTITUTES" WERE BORN

"Thus, was born this form of life, the one called Secular Institutes. This is the name Pius XII gave to these associations. Why? Because there are so many people who could not enter totally religious Institutes, as religious Congregations would be. There are a fair number of girls who wish to consecrate themselves to the Lord in a life of greater perfection and at the same time dedicate themselves to an apostolate for the salvation of souls, but they do not want the religious habit; some others have offices in societies that it is not convenient to abandon. There are, for example, high-ranking teachers, such as the university, and there are people in society who do so much good, and it is not convenient for them to leave it to enter the religious Institute. There are people who cannot live in a community, because they do not have health suitable for fully common life, or would like a more modern apostolate corresponding to current needs.

Today help in the parish is so much needed, the service of the Diocese, Catholic Action, School. These people would like a well-directed life, not the spiritual uncertainty of having a little bit of a confessor, a little bit of another, a little bit of a spirit; they would like to have a direct life

in the sense of receiving instructions every month, to have what is approved by the Holy See, that is, by the Pope, and therefore to walk safely knowing that they are in a life of greater merit. This gives so much peace to souls. A life well directed, but also freedom of initiative. One can do one good, the other another.

There are people who can no longer become nuns because they served their parents as long as they were old, until the Lord left them. Now to enter a religious institute they can't because their age has passed. There are people who still have family commitments. Then they would like to be a little nimble in the new needs of the times, while still living under obedience, to earn the merit of such virtue. There are people in large numbers who would like to sanctify themselves and save souls, to help souls. These could not enter Religious Institutes, Religious Congregations with the habit and common life, and so the Church has provided as follows: stay in the world and make yourselves holy; give a good example, live your life fully Christian, consecrate yourselves to God and work in the apostolate that is possible for you.

The Church with Secular Institutes receives all these children, all these little children under her special guidance so that they may attain holiness and work as well as possible in society". (Alberione, MCS p. 9-10).

As we can see at the beginning in the first meditation (July 20, 1958) to the first group presented by Fr Stella, Fr Alberione presents the possibility of a new form of Consecrated Life by grasping the necessity of the times and the official approval of the Church. Here one can grasp as the first element is the possibility of having a solid and lasting spiritual guide to do good in contemporary society, that is, to do good to the people of today in a modern way. Underline, we can see the same elements that are at the origin of the Pauline Family, but with a new possibility, which was not there before.

APOSTOLATE

"Work for the salvation of souls, ward off dangers and provide the means for souls to be saved. Have a great motherhood. Aim a little at all the apostolates; not the sterility for which one has a selfish, restricted piety, a piety that is ultimately stunted, because then the person also becomes acidic. But when the soul consecrates itself to God and consecrates itself for souls, then life is full, joyful, even if there are struggles, even if there are disenchantments, even if, after so many attempts, we fail to do well. On the other hand, what should an Annunciation be? It must be what the Pope has defined her, that is, the woman who consecrates herself for souls. First, that she burn with love of God, as the first commandment says; second, that she wants to transform her life into an apostolate. These are the two expressions: to burn with love of God and to transform one's life, as far as possible, into an apostolate. This is the vocation of the Annunciation. Then two loves in the heart: God and souls; God and his glory, souls, "pax hominibus", peace to men, that is, salvation to men". (Alberione, MCS, p.377)

This meditation, made in Ariccia during the exercises of August 1962, shows us at bottom the usual themes of Fr Alberione, in fact spirituality in the Pauline Family is unique, universal, goes to the essential and takes shape in daily life.

It begins with the “salvation of souls”, in fact the “salus animarum” is the first aim of the Church itself because that is what Jesus himself did. Therefore, at the centre always remember that the end of every activity is the eternal salvation of souls, the rest, though noble, is secondary.

But this is not an ideal theoretical discourse, but in practice, that is, “pastoral” in fact says “work” for the salvation of souls (Saint Paul also reminds us that he says “I have worked more than all”). In what way? In a positive way “to procure the means”, in a negative way to ward off dangers. Fr Alberione reduces the pastoral manuals to the bone! But essentiality becomes a simple example: “have a great motherhood”. We can see behind it that he is inviting us to imitate Mary, the mother of Jesus. In fact, what does a mother do for her children: she loves them, she thinks of their good, not in theory, but she is concerned to ward off dangers, trials that are too great... when she cannot do it directly, she asks who can protect and help her children. He “procures the means so that souls may be saved”, here are all the active forms of the apostolate and here are also the “quickest and most effective means” that are at our disposal” therefore the Pauline apostolate in all its forms according to the concrete capacities and availability. “Aiming at all the apostolates” a big heart is not afraid of hard work, but sees the good to be achieved, the heart of a mother does not look at hard work and humiliation, rather at the good that her children receive. All apostolates, that is to say, everything small or great that can serve the salvation of souls.

But you can’t give to others if you’re cold and stiff inside. The opposite of a great motherhood is a “sterile” and “restricted” “selfish pity”. It is true for every consecrated soul and all the more so for those in the world, if they do not take care that their own soul burns with love what they can give to others.

It is not enough to do good things serve consecrated souls. Fr Alberione says this clearly in AD¹ and he no longer changes his mind: for the Pauline Apostolate consecrated souls are needed in whatever state of life they are, otherwise it is a social work not an apostolate. Here he applies it to the Annunziatine women who as consecrated souls in secular life “ferment the mass” to save souls by working incognito.

Then he refers to the Pope - after all, the Founder has always said that the Church approves of what he has intuited from the first to the last foundation - who says: “First, that you burn with love of God, as the first commandment says; second, that you want to transform your life into an apostolate. It is of an extreme synthesis: the consecrated soul “burns”, no half measures, God’s love must fill the whole heart, not a part. Burning with God’s love is an inescapable condition, it is the first commandment that cannot be separated from the second, that is, charity towards

¹ “Around 1910 he took a definitive step. He saw in a greater light: writers, technicians, propagandists, but religious men and women religious. On the one hand, he brought souls to the highest perfection, that of those who also practice the evangelical counsels, and to the merit of apostolic life. On the other hand, to give more unity, more stability, more continuity, more supernaturality to the apostolate. To form an organization, but religious; where forces are united, where dedication is total, where doctrine will be purer. Societies of souls who love God with all their mind, their strength, their heart; they offer themselves to work for the Church, content with the divine salary: “You will receive a hundredfold, you will possess eternal life. He rejoiced then, considering part of these souls to be militia of the earthly Church, and part triumphant in the heavenly Church”. (AD 24).

others. The apostolate that is not love of God that becomes charity towards others is “straw”, which burns and nothing remains. For those who live “in the century”, at home, in the concealment of work, the first instrument is their own life, therefore “want to transform their life into an apostolate”. It is true in the end for every Christian, but for a consecrated soul it must be so as to “burn”.

“This is the vocation of the Annunziatine. Then two loves in the heart: God and souls”. But with delicacy she adds to the “desire” requested previously, “insofar as it is possible, in apostolate”. The masters of souls know well that if one does not measure up to the effort souls are discouraged and lost, one must strive for the good but ask for the good. “Inasmuch as it is possible” is at the same time the sense of measure, the little ones are asked how much they can bring to the stronger ones a weight commensurate with them, but also applied to the specific secular lifestyle, in secular life there are times and possibilities different from those of the convent, but also opportunities for good and apostolate that cannot be reached by those in the convent. Here, we can observe, that Fr Alberione himself has a great and ardent heart, but is concerned to give a “measure” to those who listen to him appropriate to his perhaps and his lifestyle.

Finally, last point: “Then two loves in the heart: God and souls”. He concludes this thought with a synthesis that is at the same time a classic of spirituality of all times, but also a veiled (not too much) reference to Pauline spirituality, that is, to the motto of the Coat of Arms² of the Society of St. Paul and the Pauline Family.

“Gloria Dei, Pax hominibus”³ (cf. Lk 2:14), is a program and a synthesis of Pauline spirituality and apostolate: it is the same of the Church, the same of Mary, Jesus was incarnated for this, and the angels proclaim him at the birth of Jesus (therefore the mystery of the Incarnation that could not be without the silent and hidden mystery of the Annunciation). More is not possible! And this is what it means to burn with a big heart.

“And thirdly, fulfill your apostolate well. Yes, every Annunziatine has her own apostolate, chosen according to her circumstances and tendencies, but there is also the common apostolate which is the most intimate union with the Pious Society of Saint Paul, which is destined to bring light to souls by modern means: that is, the press, the cinema, radio, television, records, etc. Collaborate.” (Alberione, MCS p, 408).

² I recommend reading this text: “The Coat of Arms of the Congregation”, G. Alberione, Sermons to the Pastorelle Sisters. vol. VII 1954 1955, pp. 177-79. Meditation held at Albano Laziale 28-11-1954 on the occasion of the presentation of the new wooden Coat of Arms, which is found in many communities (it is recognized because in the Host there is the acrostic M V V V).

³ Also see this other text: G. Alberione, “Per il cinquantesimo”, San Paolo n.6 1964 p.1-4), in particular: “GLORY TO GOD + PEACE TO MEN. These are the aims. The purposes for which Jesus Christ appeared to men in the manger were sung by the Angels: “Glory to God and peace to men”. The glory of God is the ultimate and absolute goal of the Incarnation, Redemption and sanctification. The second goal is the salvation of mankind: peace with God and peace with neighbour. For the Pauline Family there are no other ends; the same ends therefore for which the Redemption was accomplished”.

In concrete terms, every Annunciatine has her apostolate, which is her ordinary life, without ever forgetting her intimate union with the Society of St. Paul and her dutiful collaboration.

THE DRESS OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

“Here are the examples. After all, all those who embrace the life of perfection are primarily concerned with poverty. The Poverty is throat mortification, moderation, the modesty of housing, mortification, and modesty of dress. In Secular Institutes such as ours, it is not forbidden to possess; no, the right to possess is not taken away; but the use must be regulated by obedience. The dress of the Gabrielino, the dress of the Annunciatine must be according to the use of time, but of those people with modest clothes who, therefore, in the world, go almost unnoticed, because they live and dress like others, except in what was immodest or superfluous or luxurious. Poverty leads to this modest use of things. It also leads to work. Work is obligatory for all men, especially for Christians and for those who consecrate themselves to God”. (Alberione, MCS2, p. 65).

We comment on this text, not because the female universe is more sensitive to clothing, but to understand how The Primo Maestro teaches about it.

The context is that of “Poverty”, religious life requires industrious poverty. Poverty, for Fr Alberione, means providing for needs.

And for this reason, he starts from how Christ and the Apostles lived, and he also mentions the tunic on which the soldiers threw their lot under the cross. So, the dress must be seen under the dimension of the vow of Poverty and also according to the “Pauline wheel of Poverty”.

But the Primo Maestro speaks of it in relation to religious life, and here we must make a comment. The habit is the external sign with which one recognizes persons consecrated to God, it is a form of visual witness and therefore of the apostolate, it is not a habit or an aesthetic distinction but a public witness with one’s own presence. But characteristic of Secular Institutes and not having this visibility, the witness must be given in concealment, it must be one’s own life of ardent charity for the love of Christ that manifests the Christian life.

The habit must be “according to the use of time”, that is, “with modest clothes that, therefore, in the world, go almost unnoticed”. Here we are at the opposite end of aesthetics and visibility. Here, because we are in the context of work and poverty, Christian industriousness counts, giving a good example in hiding. Not loud trumpets, but carrying with our lives the testimony of the Gospel, “the scent of its knowledge! (cf. 2 Cor 2:14).

So, it is not only a matter of “dressing” but of a way of life that requires concealment and industriousness for the Kingdom of Heaven. What sense would it make not to wear a dress but to present oneself on social occasions or at every occasion as “Annunciatine” means to deny this style of industrious concealment which requires the consecration of the consecrated life in the century.

Also interesting is the expression “according to the use of time”. Fr Alberione is a man of the twentieth century, he saw well how the world has changed and also dress and fashion. From the “Belle Epoque” to the “Sixties” many seasons have passed, and not the slightest problem.

Sometimes there is the risk that one gets stuck in a style that was initially very ordinary and is dressed in a style that is useless to the salvation of souls. One day an Annunciata asked The Primo Maestro if they could do the “permanent”, Fr Alberione disarmingly answered her that the Lord looks into the heart and not over the head, go ahead. The way of life that Fr Alberione asks of his Secular Consecrated Ones is what pleases God and not what pleases men. But living almost incognito you bring His presence, humanly instead you have to disappear. So dress “according to the time” and live according to the will of God.

THE REASON FOR THE NAME ANNOUNCED

“Why is the Institute named after Maria Annunziata? Because the Son of God became incarnate and came to redeem the world. The first creature who accepted redemption, and thus accepted new life, was Mary who said: “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, be it made of me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). She is the first Christian and the first soul redeemed and more abundantly redeemed; she is the first soul that belonged to the Church because united with Jesus Christ, head of the Mystical Body that is the Church. Hence from this reality the name of the Institute: Maria Annunziata. The other, the Men’s Institute, which is placed side by side, is called “Saint Gabriel”, because it was Saint Gabriel who brought the announcement of the Redemption. Three times he brought the announcement of the Redemption, first to the Prophet Daniel, then to Zechariah and then to Mary Most Holy. (Alberione, MCS, 36-37).

“Now, why call yourself Annunciata? Does this name have a reason? It’s not by chance. The fact of the Annunciation and, therefore, of the Incarnation of the Son of God when Mary said: “Fiat mihi secundum Verbum tuum”, is the greatest fact in history, because then begins our redemption, Jesus preached his doctrine and instituted the sacraments, the Church, and left us his most holy examples. He died on the cross-obtaining grace for us, and all good things flow from there. Therefore, Annunciata means to be in the center of history and at the beginning of redemption. And the most beautiful name.

In parenthesis I note that I keep the office of forming the Annunciata, in general, but in particular I have entrusted it to Fr Gabriele Amorth”. (Alberione, MCS,180).

“(.) You see what a privilege for the Gabrielini and the Annunciata. Three times a day, with the Angelus, Mary is remembered, who receives the Annunciation of the Incarnation and consents. It is the most beautiful day of humanity: it must also be beautiful for you. The most useful day for humanity, when the Son of God became man, assumed human nature. And so there is no other easier way than to remember what is the grace of the vocation to the Annunciation. Three times a day”. [Alberione, MCS p. 323]

“[...] Beautiful is the title “Annunciata” because it recalls the great day, the best day of humanity, of all human history: the day of the Annunciation.” (Alberione, MCS p. 327)

If Fr Alberione is clear that the title of Mary Queen of the Apostles is the devotion of the Pauline Family, indeed it is the first Marian title, why name the Institute after the Annunciation?

The Mariology of The Primo Maestro needs further study, here we shall only touch on a few useful hints. Let us remember Alberione teaches that – in addition to Mother of God – there are

three main titles of Mary, as indicated by Leo XII: *Matrem Ecclesiae, Magistram ac Reginam Apostolorum*⁴.

But the Primo Maestro always has a reflection on what is most original, (also “Master/rabbi” is the term with which the disciples called him). So, he also applies the same reasoning to Mary, so the first title, that is, as Jesus called her was “Mother”, that would be the tenderness and filial confidence with which we should approach Mary (without forgetting that she is Mother of God)⁵.

For the Primo Maestro Mary Queen of Apostles is like the summa of all the titles of Mary that extend between the two dogmas that mark the life of Fr Alberione; the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. It will be said and what does this have to do with it? In between is the Annunciation. It is true that Mary is the Mother of God, but it all begins with that “fiat” where salvation begins historically in Mary's adhesion to the will of God. Let us also remember that the date was already dear to the Founder, which was the traditional day for the professions of the Disciples, not by chance. There are many meditations on the Annunciation.

We can add that for an institute of secular life, which is hidden and yet brings Jesus into the world, what is better than the Annunciation as a model: to say yes to the Lord, to have God in one's heart while the world knows nothing. The first apostolate is seen from Alberione precisely in Mary who, after the Annunciation of the Angel, goes to visit Elizabeth. She carries Jesus within herself, this is the apostolate. That is why, even though the most complete title is that of Mary Queen of Apostles, she also wanted to emphasize the mystery of the Incarnation in Mary, that is, the Annunciation.

Fr Gino Valeretto, ssp

⁴ “Leo XIII in a letter exhorting the faithful to the devotion of the Rosary, says: Let us always consider Mary as *Matrem Ecclesiae, Magistram ac Reginam Apostolorum*. Mary is to be considered as Mother of the Church, that is, of the faithful, and Teacher and Queen of the Apostles. Then let us consider this triple title which is given to the Blessed Virgin...” [MCS2, MCS2 p. 25]

⁵ “[...] This title given to Maria is so pleasing to her. On earth what was the first title given to Mary? They give Mary many titles now, don't they? We have an essay on them in the litanies: there are six hundred and more titles given to Mary. Oh, but the first title is the one that moved Mary's heart, and it was when Jesus as a child, a child indeed, learning to speak, said for the first time: “Mother,” he called his mother! The second title is “Mother of the Apostles”. Queen and Mother of the Apostles. Immediately afterward come to the Apostles. After Jesus, the first to honor Mary were the Apostles. Jesus, it is understandable, he was the Son of God and the Son of Mary; but among the faithful, among the members of the Church, the first title was “Mary Queen of the Apostles”. They called her mother, they called her their teacher, etc.: in essence they honoured her as their teacher and queen. This title moved her. Countless graces are obtained for this title.” (Alberione, MCS2 p. 33-34).