



**SIF**

Segretariato Internazionale per la Pastorale vocazionale e la Formazione

## **RELIGIOUS VOWS COMMUNICATION AND THE PAULINE FAMILY**

### **Premise**

In our presentations of the “religious vows” – as they were called during the time of Fr. Alberione – almost never is the fact taken into account that the Paulines are charismatically and therefore substantially an integral part of a religious “Family.” Paulines, both men and women, in fact, cannot be understood in their totality if placed out of the context of the Pauline Family. This datum, very clear in the thought of the Founder, has not always been in the minds – and therefore in the life – of his children who from time to time have followed and therefore have not always been capable of drawing from it the due consequences in their choices and above all in the realizations of the Pauline charism.

In the international Seminar of study on the *Actualization of the Pauline Charism in the Third Millennium* – just to give a concrete example – the report that deals with the “Pauline religious vows” does not hint minimally about this theme<sup>1</sup>. Now, even an Alberionian quote like the following:

«In your Congregation let there not only be external obedience but union in mind, in heart, in works; first of all in *mind* and in *heart* so that each one think, will, desire what the whole family must will and desire, which family is still in a certain evolution» (FSP35, p. 246),

also interpreted with circumspection and in terms dictated by circumstances, allows us however to pick up that “family spirit” constantly reasserted by Sr. Caterina A. Martini, even on the occasion of the “separation” of the two communities (FSP and SSP) in Rome:

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<sup>1</sup> *The actualization of the Pauline charism in the third millennium: spirituality and mission*, Ariccia, 18 June-3 July 2008. The report being referred to is that of Fr. Guido Gandolfo, *I voti religiosi paolini*, pp. 273-306.

«However, it must not be thought that in that moment – the year is 1932 and the FSP of Rome are established in the house “Divina Provvidenza” in via A. Pio – the word distinction expresses a will to separate and dependence arouses particular autonomist claims. The two institutions continue to grow with a very strong sense of family and to feel as their own all the expressions of the apostolate and of spirituality: in fact, it is very difficult from the chronicles of those years to single out what is printed by the Daughters and what is printed by the Pious Society of Saint Paul and, on the level of diffusion, normally no difference is made between the two productions»<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, talking of obedience, the Founder, besides requiring the commitment of the “totality” of the single person, insists on a “totality” of obedience in works that has its logical realization in the charismatic bed of the «entire family which – we are in 1935 – is still in a certain evolution». Also Sr. Caterina A. Martini reminds us that when Fr. Alberione affirms: «“The Congregation is at a third of its manifestation”[...] it is clear that the affirmation [...] refers to the whole Pauline Family and leads to consider one more time the development of the Daughters in the global project»<sup>3</sup>.

For us, who must not undergo the restrictions of the CJC of 1917 and who see sprout, like new and very varied mushrooms, manifestations of religious life, it should not be complicated to recognize in one way the originality of the Alberionian thought, and in another admit that that thought we still have not studied and understood integrally.

## 0. Organization of the present study

There are very interesting contributions relative to the study of the “evangelical counsels.” Fr. Silvio Sassi, in a reflection of 2008 for the meeting of the Ibero-american Juniors and dedicated to the **Religious vows and communication**, referred to the following affirmation of the document **Potissimum Institutioni** [*Directives on the formation in the religious Institutes*, of 2 February 1990, reported in its entirety in the second part of our **Ratio Formationis**] of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life:

«In concrete, there is no religious life existing “by itself” to which would be grafted like a subsidiary addition the specific end and the particular charism of each Institute. There is no, in the Institutes dedicated to the apostolate, searching for sanctity or profession of the evangelical counsels or a life vowed to God and to his service that is not intrinsically tied to the service of the Church and of the world (cf PC 5). Also, “apostolic and charitable action is included in the nature itself of the religious life (...)»

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<sup>2</sup> CATERINA A. MARTINI fsp, *Le Figlie di San Paolo. Note per una storia 1915-1984*, Figlie di San Paolo – Casa Generalizia – Roma 1994, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, pp. 213.

must be imbued with apostolic spirit, and all apostolic action animated by religious spirit” (PC 8). Service for one’s neighbor neither separates nor divides the religious from God. If he is moved by truly theological charity, this service assumes the value of service for God» (n. 17),

and drew the conclusion: «If “the specific end and the particular charism” are not “a subsidiary addition” to a religious life “by itself,” but rather what characterizes in a unique way the religious consecration, for us Paulines the charism of evangelizing in communication gives a particular “color” to our vows also. Therefore it is theologically correct, besides the biblical bases, to think and to live our vows in the perspective of our charism of communication. Communication, understood as opportunity to announce the Kingdom, is the hermeneutical key for the religious vows of the Paulines».

And this fundamental “hermeneutical key” must be applied also to the context in which it is expressed and that is that of the Pauline Family. Fr. Alberione has not founded so many Congregations that operate in a distinct and parallel way, but has willed to construct in a gradual way, as a function of a single and complex mission of evangelization, an integrated multi-congregational organism capable of realizing it: precisely the Pauline Family. This is the sense of the synthetic definition that we find in UPS: «All the Institutes considered together form the Pauline Family. All the Institutes have a common origin. All the Institutes have a common spirit. All the Institutes have converging ends» (UPS III, 185).

In light of what others have already said, it seems to us there can be three lines of inspiration that must guide us in this presentation of the “vows”:

1. the charismatic-biblical foundation,
2. the apostolic-communication aspect,
3. the Pauline Family context.

## **1. Chastity in the Pauline Family**

The motive for which “chastity” is placed in first position, can be explained, besides due to the order given by the *Constitutions* (cf artt. 26-46), hearing also a meditation on the “vows” dictated by Fr. Alberione himself to the Daughters of Saint Paul in 1935:

«Since our three vows are duties of state, they represent the will of God for us. Through the profession of the holy vows, we choose a profession, an occupation that we want to exercise through the practice of the three vows themselves and the work of the apostolate: or else a life that tends to perfection... The religious soul, therefore, does not give to the Lord only the fruit, but also the plant: **she belongs completely to**

God, totally and entirely. Therefore, let her be happy because of the choice made, for which she will please ever more her Spouse, Jesus Christ. When two spouses in a family are in agreement, what a beautiful union! The same with union with the Lord, therefore rather than talk to you about chastity, I shall talk to you about charity. The person who reserves all his/her heart for Jesus shall have perfect charity, which is equivalent to perfect chastity» (FSP35, 246-249 *in passing*).

**Chastity-charity** (*agápe*) appears to Fr. Alberione as the condition serving as the base of the Pauline religious life, like that point of departure toward that mystical union which for the apostle joins God and mankind in a single movement of love (cf *Const.* 27).

**1.1 Biblical foundation** – In light of the biblical saying, and of the writings of the Founder that confirm it, we discover the importance of the couple man-woman. Known to us are the pages of that writing which opens the second phase of his ideal foundation (AD 23-24) and which Fr. Alberione proposes as an object of meditation for young priests: *La donna associata allo zelo sacerdotale* (Woman associated with priestly zeal) (1911-1912):

«CHAPTER VI – THE VOCATION OF THE WOMAN - Bougaud<sup>4</sup>, after having considered this power of the woman, exclaims: «*Initium et finis mulier*»: in every great thing you find there as beginning and end the woman. And Tacitus:<sup>5</sup> «*Inesse in eis quid divinum*»: woman has in herself a footprint of the power of God. But why on earth this God, who does all things well, who rightly plans everything as to weight and measure, according to his most high ends, why was this God so generous with the woman? There is no doubt about the answer: because he had destined her for a very noble calling: the gifts given to the woman are nothing more than means needed for her mission.

Let us review the origin of the world: the truth of this assertion will appear there. After God created man, Holy Scripture says, he looked at him and, his heart touched<sup>6</sup> with compassion at the sight of his loneliness, said these words, one of the most tender coming from his lips: «***It is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a companion like him, to be of help to him***»<sup>7</sup>. And he created the woman as help to man. And to help him in what? In his works, in his anxieties: so bitter is pain when you suffer it alone! In his joys, in his dreams of happiness: one enjoys little, when one enjoys alone! And since man is not created for the earth, but for heaven, since God placed in him heavenly hopes, thrusts and sublime desires, since the world is an

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<sup>4</sup> Louis-Victor-Émile Bougaud was a professor of dogma and of history of religions in the major seminary of Dijon. As a writer Bougaud proposed to lead back society to Christ. As an apologist he emphasized the response of Christianity to the needs and aspirations of individuals, of families and of the society of his time.

<sup>5</sup> Publius Caius Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 54-120), Latin historian of the period of the Flavi and of Trajan.

<sup>6</sup> About to be struck, struck.

<sup>7</sup> Cf Gen 2,18. On the biblical theme of “help” (*‘ēzer*) cf R. Torti, *Uomo e donna nella Sacra Scrittura*, in L. Tortorella (edited by), *The Mulieris dignitatem in the post-modern in light of Mary*, (Essay Research Series, 10) IF Press srl, 2012, pp. 23-60, in part. 32-45.

exile, while heaven is the fatherland: to support man in this journey, to lead him to eternity, to go there with him constitutes the highest mission of the woman: *adiutorium simile sibi*.<sup>8</sup> Curved on the earth he had to cultivate, man would have often lost sight of heaven: and God gave him an angel, an apostle, a friend close, persuasive and amiable who had to maintain for him the light and the taste for heaven ». (DA 61-62)

It is a text that comes out to be illuminating, if it is taken into account that to write it is a young fellow – not yet thirty – reserved and self-controlled as Fr. Alberione, but who – after having thought of a “Catholic organization” (cf AD 23) – changes and decides to found a religious family (cf AD 24). Regarding this, the comment of Fr. Sassi is useful:

«Consecrated chastity is immersed in the mystery of the identity itself of God: “God is love” (1Jn 4,8) and of man: “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2,18) to give an answer to his bio-psychical constitution, to the need to generate and to the desire for physiological satisfaction of the sexual pleasure.  
The human person, in fact, by birth already finds himself defined in a sexualized corporal structure (male and female) and in a psychological condition of complementarity (need of the other)» (cf *The religious vows and communication*, 4.1).

In the “Pauline” sphere, therefore, the “vow of chastity” accentuates and further makes final the complementarity of man-woman and does it in the dynamic context of the identity itself of God: «God is love»; a context that transforms its only physical fruitfulness, capable – but not always – of generating children, in “apostolic” fruitfulness that is realized – always – in «acting the truth in love» (Eph 4,15) as the apostle Paul says; because as Fr. Alberione explains:

«Our Institute is a *teaching* one. **It makes her own the truths and the teaching of the Church; in order to present them to souls through the word and through technical means combined, for the Priest; through technical means, only for the Disciple, in union with the Priest; aiming at souls: “Acting the truth in love.”**<sup>9</sup>  
The Institute teaches everything: firstly, what serves directly for heaven, that is, faith, morals and cult; then everything: “*whatever is good, is true, etc.*”.<sup>10</sup>  
The right goal. There is one who studies to know, for satisfaction good humanly but not supernaturally; there is one who studies to be admired, and that to attribute to oneself an esteem due only to God; there is one who studies to teach others, and this is of much merit, especially if it is united to educate. **The Pauline, by multiplying the manuscript through technology does a work of charity much more immense just like the souls to which he offers the water that springs up to eternal life»** (UPS II, 172).

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<sup>8</sup> Cf Gen 2,18: «A *help* similar to him».

<sup>9</sup> «Acting the truth in charity» (Eph 4,15).

<sup>10</sup> «Everything that is good, that is true...» (cf Phil 4,8).

It does not arouse stupor that even historically there appears first the male Pauline and then the female Pauline. However, there where the rapport according to nature passes for love, to end in, when it can – since sterile couples are not rare – generation (something that only the CJC of 1984 has understood, cf can. 1055 §1); in the Pauline religious life there exists a fecundity which, baptized and confirmed by the trinitarian identity of the God-love, and beyond human genitality, and actively testifying in the apostolate, is the charismatic power placed at the service of the Church and of men of this time. As in the natural couple «the community of life is ordained to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of the children» so being Pauline Family is ordained to the good of all Paulines and to their apostolic fecundity.

The creative relationship that has characterized the rapport of Fr. Alberione with Sr. Thecla Merlo, cannot be stopped at only their experience. It too possesses charismatic nuclei that wait to be concretely developed. It is awaited by the Church itself which has the right to receive a prophetic grace that can derive to her from the Pauline Family. Even this one is part of that charismatic tradition, that superabundance of wealth that the foundational grace has transmitted to us and that is not only for us. There is a sterility that obstructs the action of the Spirit and that cannot hide itself behind the alibi of ignorance: «we did not know, we would never have imagined so great a wealth». This false ignorance is judged by the Gospel without ambiguity (cf Mt 25,14-30).

The creative relationship that characterizes the “chastity” of the Pauline Family has notable effects in the apostolic activity.

**1.2 The apostolic-communications aspect** – This aspect has been much well developed in the reflection of Fr. Sassi which therefore is reported without interruption. Here we limit ourselves to emphasize the riches of the communications and dialectic condition in which the Pauline Family finds itself to be by its constitution. While other religious Institutes are forced to confront outside experts, not always knowing the charismatic specificities, the Pauline Family has in itself such a differentiation of competences as would allow her an internal dialectic optimized at the root. Often this wealth is neutralized by an infantile attitude of competition or, worse, of revenge that has nothing to do with the spirit of emulation of the origins.

«4.3. **Blessed James Alberione**, in describing chastity as power for evangelization, has invited to be at the same time **virgins** and **capable of generating**: “This is the apostolate: to be virgins and mothers” (*Vademecum*, n. 978 [*Predicazione sulla Regina*

*degli apostoli*, 1956, p. 208]); a sublime example is Mary, a virgin and mother of Christ. Often Fr. Alberione, while talking of the apostolate, describes it as a “duty of spiritual motherhood and fatherhood” because Christ must be given to the world (cf *Vademecum*, n. 980 [*Spiritualità paolina*, 1962, pp. 407-408]).

“If the Sister has renounced motherhood, it is to become a mother in a more extended sense: mother of all; mother of all the children, of many young people, of many men, through her prayer, her suffering, the apostolate of the word and of the editions” (*Vademecum*, n. 981 [*Meditazioni e Istruzioni alle FSP*, 1956, p. 78]).

Completing what Fr. Alberione says for the Pauline Sister with what he affirms about the Priest and the Disciple of the Society of Saint Paul, we can see how he intended to present the celibacy and Pauline chastity in **close relation with the apostolate** and through an evangelization lived as “giving the life of God” to all through communication; fathers and mothers using communication.

4.4. The vocation of every Pauline is first of all a **personal gift** of God that must be valorized in evangelization employing communication **together with others**, since the Pauline mission is entrusted to the community. **If the communitarian dimension concerns all the religious vows, it seems more evident in chastity.**

The entire **formative period** of the Pauline apostle must serve to educate apostolically also love and sexuality on the level of individual affective maturity, of fraternal life in community, of strong experience of friendship and of capacity for a serene social life in contact above all with the lay collaborators.

Fr. Alberione, in indicating a formation of the **whole person** (mind, heart and will), intends to offer a profile of the complete Pauline apostle even as a person who “knows how to love and allows himself to be loved” while carrying out the apostolate of communication.

4.5. Through the strength of this affective equilibrium with himself and in his interpersonal and group relations, the Pauline can valorize chastity at the most in the perspective of communication: to be capable of **generating life** in continuation in the apostolate, knowing that he is “**fecund**” in every aspect of the Pauline mission.

Pauline chastity lived fully in communication **prevents** the lack of creativity, aridity, monotony, mechanical repetition, banality, superficiality, ignorance, distraction, temporariness, the lack of planning, partial investment of forces and energies.

The fruitfulness of Pauline chastity **is manifested** in openness and capacity to listen to history and to the public that changes, in sensibility to new trends and novelties of society and of persons, in appreciation of creativity and new attempts, in the ability to observe the development of the market and the predilections of the public, in the attention to think and prepare in an attractive way the apostolic product, in a particular attention to the new generations that make up a new culture of life, in the valorization of one’s body as a form of communication in our apostolates, above all the audiovisual ones, in the care of dressing and of demeanor as a means to take care of public relations and relations with lay collaborators.

Pauline chastity for communication knows how to evaluate in right measure its choice for celibacy, understood not only as condition of life so as to be able to be entirely dedicated to the apostolic mission, but above all as a “new form” to realize one’s will to create life around one’s self with apostolic fecundity and with the “pleasure” of communication that has become a sublimation of the powers of love and of sex».

**1.3 The context of Pauline Family** - “Chastity-charity” helps us to understand the regime of gift (received and given) within which the entire Pauline Family moves. We read with a certain amazement and admiration texts of thinkers and contemporary religious who have deepened the theme of relationships, interpersonal rapports, mutual gift, mystical betrothals, etc, and we do not take into account that these contents are at the base of our spirituality and should find in us the experts and the “masters” that make of them the object of their evangelizing communication.

Even vocational promotion first, and then the various stages of formation ask for a particular structuring that not only now and then calls to mind this reality. One who enters the ranks of the Pauline Family must know from the start to what charismatic riches he is called and not be constrained to be aware of it – perhaps – afterward, if he is fortunate, and meets persons who make him understand it. One must pass from a journey that is only personal to a congregational course that automatically puts in relation every Pauline with the reality of an organic and integrated family. It is necessary therefore to pass from a type of formation that is only exclusive, to a formation that is also inclusive in a Pauline way. (cf 1Cor 9,19-23).

The reading of the *Constitutions* facilitates this structuring. It is interesting to note that the exergue (taken from ArGe/VRg, 162) with which is introduced the “Vow of chastity,” before art. 26 of the *Constitutions*, corresponds to FSP35 cited above. Like saying that what the Founder has said to the Daughters of Saint Paul is good also for the SSP. Article 26 of the *Constitutions*:

«**26. Consecrated chastity is equivalent to integral love.** In giving to God our person, we **assume and also consecrate**

- all the human values of our body and spirit,
- and our **personal relations with all men**».

does not but reassert what we have said until here: that is, that chastity is the same as integral love; and that in the total gift to God of our person we assume all relations and therefore with greater reason those with our brothers and sisters in the religious family.

In a level of extreme concreteness, art. 28 asks of every Pauline to execute a journey of autoformation and “ascetical relation” that finds a parallel in the journey to which only normally invited are the couples. Additionally, the religious lives his chastity as the “gift of the Father” and to it he responds in Christ as a “new man”:

«**28. Consecrated chastity touches intimately the deepest inclinations of human nature and is a “gift” of the Father:** “Not all understand this word, but only those to whom it is



granted” (Mt 19,11). **Such a gift**, equivalent to an absolute taking of possession on the part of the Lord of our person, **d demands a response** that can be given only by the “new man,” who lives in Christ the reality of the paschal mystery **and commits all his personal energies in a continuous and gradual effort toward psychological and affective maturity, adapting to the scope the adequate means».**

Even the relations with the rest of the Pauline Family – whether individual or apostolic – ask for the commitment of all the personal energies in a continuous and gradual effort toward psychological and affective maturity. The «look how they love each other» recorded by Tertullian (*Apologetico* 39,7) should be valid also for us, not only for the Christians!

Strongly aware that there is always a need for a “serene vigilance” (*Const.* 29) and a constant and fruitful rapport with God (*Const.* 30), it’s the same with us about the fact that what applies to the individual community of life – «Thus it is also important to create in the community a **true family environment** and **cultivate a deep fraternal friendship**» (*ib.*) – must also apply to the wider community that involves the entire Pauline Family. We wish that it be not misinterpreted or misunderstood: the serene and authentic rapport of fraternity and sorority there where they may manifest themselves in our communities. It must not be forgotten that from the very first beginnings our charism has been nourished by the rapports of men and women who have put all their life at the service of God in the Pauline Family. Finally, the *Constitutions* remind us that:

«**31.** From the gift of chastity derives an extraordinary fecundity and apostolic fatherhood. [...] We make of freedom of heart the point of departure for a simple and sincere meeting with men by means of the apostolate».

Even this reality would be lived not only by the individual Congregation, but organically by the entire Pauline Family. Our presenting ourselves to the men of today as brothers and sisters joined by God in just one apostolic work is in itself already a very eloquent witnessing.

## **2. Poverty in the Pauline Family**

In concluding the treatment of the “vow of chastity” the *Constitutions* reassert:

«**32.** We shall not emphasize on our part the aspects of renunciation, but shall give witness to joy and serenity, dedicating ourselves to the “treasure” that we have discovered» (cf Mt 13,44).

It would seem provocative, for one who possesses a “treasure,” to talk of poverty. Now even «belonging to this wonderful Pauline Family» (AD 3) should be part of the “treasure” received. And in fact it is thus, even if this is not always taken advantage of as one of the convincing and enthralling elements in our vocation promotion.

“Poverty-riches” constitutes one of the «four wheels» of the Pauline cart, «together with piety, study and apostolate» (*Const.* 33). Considering it well, it is effectively a matter of very great riches and all of them received “in favor” of others (cf *Const.* 23).

**2.1 Biblical foundation** – True wealth according to God, in fact, consists in giving away one’s “treasure” to others. It is the “transferring,” which has in the gift of self, as Christ has realized it, the sole and exhaustive reference. Art. 34 of the *Constitutions* explains synthetically this context through the twofold reference to Mary, the “servant” of the Lord, and to the apostle Paul:

«34. In the biblical world appears from the beginning the preference of God for the poor and the derelict, detached from themselves and completely depending on the Lord. On the threshold of the new testament, the virgin Mary “excels among the humble and poor of the Lord who await salvation from him with confidence.” And saint Paul makes us observe how in Christ poverty reaches its culmination. The same apostle gives a vivid example of voluntary detachment from material goods (cf 1Cor 9 and Phil 4,12), as serious availability to the divine will and to the apostolate, in full liberty of the spirit...».

**2.2 The communications-apostolic aspect** – Let us still allow ourselves to be directed by the words of Fr. Sassi:

«Poverty leads to have the heart of Christ who “had compassion on this crowd” (Mk 8,2). To feel “compassion” for those who do not know Christ is not a paternalistic sentiment or a love of missionary power, but the proposal of meeting with Christ to the freedom of the person and of groups.

3.2. Blessed James Alberione describes the figure of the Pauline apostle through a threefold love: “The apostolic soul of the good press is the one who first of all is in love with God. ...Secondly, the apostolic soul is the one who loves other men. ...Thirdly, the apostolic soul is the one who chooses the press apostolate” (*Vademecum*, n. 946 [*Meditazioni e Istruzioni alle FSP*, 14 July 1931]).

Apostolic testimony is born of a profound experience: “It is not possible that a soul full of love for God can keep everything for herself. When a basin is full and it continues to receive additional water, it necessarily overflows and the more abundantly it overflows the more water it receives” (*Vademecum*, n. 953 [cf *FSP-SdC*, 26]).

Pauline poverty is to not withhold for oneself the gift and experience of faith in Christ: “Apostle is the one who bears God in his soul and radiates him around himself”

(*Vademecum*, n. 960 [UPS IV, 277]); “The person who has little faith has also little zeal” (*Vademecum*, n. 963 [*Per un rinnovamento spirituale*, p. 29]).

**3.3. When Pauline poverty, understood as centrality of Christ in personal life, also becomes a community value in the Congregation, it assumes two complementary aspects.** To be true Paulines it is necessary to assimilate the insistence of Fr. Alberione about “**laboriousness**” and the “**salvific value**” of material work that is so abundant in our Congregation. Blessed James Alberione is fascinated by the thirty years of the hidden life of Christ, finding in this mystery a great teaching for the Paulines: “A God who redeems the world through the domestic virtues and through hard work until age thirty! It’s redemptive work, work of apostolate, exhausting work” (*Vademecum*, n. 450 [AD 127-128]). “Jesus Christ in heaven shows, while honoring and supplicating the Father, his hands not only pierced by the nails but also callous” (*Vademecum*, n. 453 [CISP, p. 1084]). “The mystery of Christ the worker seems to us to be more profound than the mystery of his Passion and Death. ...The sweat on his forehead at Nazareth was not less redemptive than his sweat of blood in Getsemani!” (*Vademecum*, n. 298 [CISP, p. 1074]).

It is the same Fr. Alberione who reminds of the second aspect: “All the Institutes are bound to poverty, but not all in the same way: one is the poverty of a Cistercian, another that of a Jesuit. There is this norm of Saint Thomas: “Religious poverty has an instrumental value, with regard to the two ends to which it is destined: sanctification and the apostolate” (*Vademecum*, n. 467 [UPS I, 455]). For the Paulines Fr. Alberione specifies: “**The Institute must be poor and rich at the same time. Poor in our individual observance of poverty. Rich in our means of apostolate**” (*Vademecum*, n. 446 [*Esercizi e meditazioni del Primo Maestro*, 1952, p. 206]).

The Pauline apostolic activities demand large-scale material means (houses, machines, organizational structures, means of transportation, management of persons, investments in projects and persons, etc.). **Everything that is in function of the apostolate must be of excellent quality: the apostolate merits the best in everything.**

**3.4.** When Pauline poverty makes testimony in communication, it must know how to combine the proposal of Christ as the supreme value and good of every existence with a **commitment for human values** as preparation and credibility of the faith itself. Fr. Alberione has clearly pointed out to us that “it is not necessary to talk always of religion, but to talk of everything in a Christian way” (cf *Vademecum*, nn. 1028 [AD 87], 1060 [*L’Apostolato dell’Edizione*, p. 159], 1214 [ib.]).

An original contribution as testimony of Pauline poverty lived in communication is today tied to the physiognomy of communication and to the task of the Pauline charism to remain in the forefront of phenomena in communications, so as to be a “**laboratory**” at the service of the whole ecclesial community. The proposal of the person and teaching of Christ in the multiple forms of digital communication remains as a privileged camp above all for the young Paulines. It is a matter of reelaborating the contents of the faith starting from the characteristics of informatics and telematics communication. It is necessary to look for “new ways” because the originality of the digital language has placed the Christian community in a condition of communicative “poverty.”

We Paulines are called to be also sensitive toward the “**new poverties in the sphere of communication**” through the determination to offer alternative products to a certain

poverty of contents and through an active involvement in the research, pedagogy and didactics of the actual communicative phenomenon.

**2.3 The context of the Pauline Family** – In the exergue that introduces this vow in the *Constitutions* we read: «The congregations conserve their spirit as long as they are poor; when poverty fails, what is substantial also fails». (ArGe/VRg, 291, 230). There is, in fact, not only «a personal individual poverty», but there must also be «a social poverty of the institute» (ib.). This “being poor in front of the world,” which does not mean to mask one’s wealth, is born of a real poverty and simplicity of persons and of institutes that knows how to distinguish what is mine (very little if nothing) and what is God’s. Our churches, for example, are normally very well taken care of – it was the Founder who wanted this (cf *Appunti di teologia pastorale*, pp. 369-371) – and to keep them in order are/were normally the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master. In that way poverty becomes riches for God and is realized making good use of the charismatic riches deriving from the Pauline Family... but it is not certainly sufficient. In the course of history, within the Pauline Family we have mutually helped each other in moments of need... but even this is not sufficient.

Actually the contingencies of the world – or the potential global impoverishment of the rich countries, due also to the saturation of production and to the collapse of the real power of acquisition, – drastically reveals a diffused situation that obviously weighs negatively also on our apostolic activities. However it happens that some of our apostolic works have as their principal objective that of maintaining the structure in activity. Now, since past is the time for everybody when cabbages were eaten and as soup was water used to cook them, and since on the contrary are up in exponential terms the personal requirements of each one, the problem of the “vow of poverty” is put in a serious and radical manner. For the entire Pauline Family the words of the Founder ought to be valid:

«Poverty as virtue has a positive part: it is search, it is continuous yearning for spiritual and eternal goods, yearning for the Highest Good, God! detaching the heart from things of the earth and using everything as means to reach him. Even food and rest are taken to “maintain oneself in the service of God and in the apostolate.”

The vow is a means, a stronger commitment to practice virtue better. The spirit of poverty (the first beatitude) is virtue in a high degree: when there are deep convictions, love and liking for privations and sacrifices, as to act *prompte, faciliter, delectabiliter*.<sup>11</sup> Thus numberless canonized saints and more not canonized» (UPS I, 450).

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<sup>11</sup> “With promptness, ease and delight.”

These indications ask for stances common to the entire Pauline Family. They ask for help and mutual encouragement to **make choices** that are not easy; but if discussed, received and shared they become motive of common support; choices that will have practical effects on our apostolates and on the image of the Pauline Family and therefore also to be replayed as testimonial value (cf *Constitutions*, art. 38).

### 3. Obedience in the Pauline Family

«*Obedience* is conformity of our will to that of God... Let us always remember that St. Joseph has never printed, never preached and yet he is the first among the saints: because it is conformity with God's will that makes saints! ... (FSP35, 232).

With this affirmation which at first sight catches us a bit off guard, Fr. Alberione reestablishes the right hierarchy, like saying that the Pauline charism is first of all an expression and consequence of having conformed our will to that of God. As for Saint Joseph, so also for us sanctification occupies the first place; however, there is a different way for each to sanctify himself and to conform himself to the will of God. Thus for us applies the provision of art. 37 of our *Constitutions*:

«**Placed at the service of the word of God**, we shall overspend ourselves with our brothers **to announce Christ** through the fastest and most effective means and up to date forms to reach all men. In this effort **we shall let ourselves be guided solely by the apostolic yearning of saint Paul**: "So that the word of God may run and be glorified" (2Thes 3,1).

**3.1 Biblical foundation** – Without roundabout words the *Constitutions* point out for us with clarity the references of our obedience, thus in exergue we read the thought of our Founder:

«*Perfect obedience embraces all the mind, all the will, all the heart; (...) being submissive to the Lord means giving him your will, time, body... Now if we submit all of ourselves to God, he will subject everything to us. **All is yours, but you are Christ's and Christ is God's** [1Cor 3,22]*». (ArGe/VRg 381, 301).

Therefore our life of obedience consists essentially in putting ourselves on the road indicated and traveled by Christ, a road of true salvation, of cross and resurrection, according to the will of the Father, in the Spirit. A road followed by Mary and by Paul. Themes that our *Constitutions* synthesize in this way:

«**40.** The obedience of the religious **is the assuming of the attitude of Christ toward the Father.** It is therefore first of all a rapport with God, who truly merits to be obeyed since he only is truth; he alone is capable of obliging us to his will while respecting our freedom».

«**41.** In order to realize obedience to God the Father, **it is essential to live in Christ:** in him **we shall not be** «slaves of men», **but** «chosen instruments», in his hands. Thus is excluded from our obedience servility, every abdication to ourselves, since «when we decide to obey, it is necessary to do it putting into it all our being» (Fr. Alberione) so as to respond authentically to God, who to serve is to reign [cf LG 36; CCC 786]».

**3.2 The communications-apostolic aspect** – Overcoming every negative form, ours is an active and creative obedience that is concretely manifested in the communitarian «**organization and realization** of our apostolate» which «require that each one accomplish his part in active and responsible obedience, in interdependence with one's collaborators» (cf *Constitutions and Directory* 44.1). This is why when we have organized the treatment of the vows, in first place has been located chastity-charity which is concretely manifested in the «assuming of the attitude of Christ toward the Father» and toward men, therefore in «taking part in the common search for the will of God regarding one's community» (*Const.* 43). It is a matter of “loving” and therefore of communicating God to men. Also for this vow we entrust ourselves to the words of Fr. Sassi to get the obedience of the Paulines to the will of God as an event of communication:

«**2.2. Blessed James Alberione, sensitive to the invitation of Christ** “Come ye all to me” (Mt 11,28), has willed that salvation reach also the men and women of the end of 1800 and of the first decades of 1900. For a “new evangelization” in a period characterized by the assertion of the press, wanting “to be Saint Paul living today,” Fr. Alberione, inspired by God and with the approval of the Church, starts the Society of Saint Paul to “**preach the Gospel through the press**” and, successively, through all “the fastest and most effective means” of modern communication.

**2.3.** For the Paulines the vow of obedience is grafted in the process of communication of the gospel through communication. Having to make contemporary for the men and women of today the salvation operated by Christ once for all, the Pauline thinks and lives his obedience as **hearing** the salvific will of God and **hearing** the questions regarding meaning of his contemporaries.

Pauline obedience is first of all **contemplation** of the model Christ, the Master, the Way, the Truth and the Life who preaches salvation. **Pauline sanctification, presented by Fr. Alberione as a progressive “christification,” has for purpose to make mature a faith that is not closed in the concern to save only oneself, but a missionary faith, committed in the works of communication to save others.**

**2.4.** The evolution of communication also helps to deepen continually the Pauline charism. Today communication is not only a globality of “machines for communication,” but it has transformed itself into a true unpublished “culture.”

Combined with other social and cultural phenomena, **the evolution of communication asks of the entire ecclesial community and, therefore also of the Paulines, to be concerned not only with the “contents of the faith” but with the “recipients of the announcement.”**

With true pastoral sensitivity the document **Per una pastorale della cultura** (For a pastoral of culture) (23.05.1999) of the Pontifical Council of Culture takes note of this radical change and underlines: “It is not enough to speak in order to be understood. When the recipient was in basic syntony with the message, due to his traditional culture permeated with Christianity, and at the same time globally well disposed in regard to it because of all the socio-cultural context, he could receive and understand what was proposed to him. In the present-day cultural plurality, it is necessary to join the announcement and the conditions of its reception” (n. 25).

2.5. **Pauline obedience** makes its own the apostolic program of Saint Paul to “make himself all to all” (1Cor 9,22) through the apostolate of communication. The recipient of our apostolate must be “listened to” so as to be able to communicate to him in an understandable and significant way the person and the teaching of Christ. To know well the recipient is a theological dimension of our charism that must also make use of the **techniques of surveying** public opinion and the market to “make oneself all for all” in evangelization. **We must not be afraid to put market research, marketing and publicity at the service of evangelization.** Let us leave others to be scandalized by this affirmation, and, in this regard, let us study better Fr. Alberione.

When our apostolic products don’t please the public, remain unsold, fill up our warehouses and inflate uselessly our catalogs, we are in the face of an editorial strategy that **does not “obey”** much our recipients, preferring to listen to our own tastes rather than the expectations of our public.

Pauline obedience allows every Pauline to be a “bridge” between the will of God and the capacity of the men of today for communication. To obey God means to assume the missionary love of Christ as “not for the healthy, but for the sick” (Mk 2,17), and to find the way to not limit oneself to those who believe, but direct oneself to the “faraway.”

**3.3 The context of the Pauline Family** – The verification of obedience to the plan of God on the part of all the Pauline Family allows total revision regarding our obedience and full syntony between our life and the Pauline charism. It is a matter of reexamining, for example, all that has been said in the preceding point, putting ourselves not only from the point of view of the Society of Saint Paul, but of the entire Pauline Family as a unitary reality... in front of God and his will.

Perhaps, in the annual meetings of the General Governments one will have to have the patience and the courage to answer together the question: «As Pauline Family, are we doing the will of God?» But this question – as has been said – is possible only if one accepts being an apostolic entity that surpasses the level of the individual congregation (SSP, FSP, PDDM, SJBP, AP...). It is precisely the practical diversification of the unitariness of the Pauline

charism which renders possible a realistic and constructive tackling around the will of God.

The indication of the *Constitutions* that follows:

«**42.** Toward the pastors of the Church, the Paulines – beside the obedience due in what concerns the care of souls and the public exercise of divine cult – **must collaborate with the local pastoral, in the specific area of their apostolic end**».

urges us toward a “pastoral programming” that we know to be much more effective if it is organic. Even in this case, being proposed again is the problem of “listening to the recipient” which, if it is studied with sensitivity and various apostolic competences, can be more greatly involved in pastoral action. Without counting, even in this, the testimonial power of a unitary action.

#### **4. The vow of fidelity to the Pope in the Pauline Family**

Obedience to the Pastors of the Church (cf *Const.* 42, quoted above) finds an ulterior specification in that of fidelity to the Pope. It deals with a vow which involves all religious (*CJC* 590 § 2; 593) as our *Constitutions* confirm: «**47.** Bound to obey the Pope already in virtue of the vow of obedience...», but which for us Paulines, committed in the area of evangelization, acquires a particular specification. On account of this, the *Constitutions* continue saying: «...we shall make ours, through an additional bond of a religious vow, fidelity willed by our Founder to the magisterium and pastoral guide of the Supreme Pontiff» (cf also *Const.* 49).

The *Constitutions* of the Pious Society of the Daughters of Saint Paul, in the sphere of the vow of obedience, call to mind the general terms of this vow, echoing the *CJC*: «We recognize the specific mediations: the magisterium of the church and in particular that of the Pope who we obey even in virtue of the vow of obedience (*CJC* 590 § 2)...» (*Const.* 53).

The *Rule of Life* of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master confirms obedience to the Supreme Pontiff as adhesion to the mediated will of God: «We promise to adhere to the will of God mediated by the Supreme Pontiff...» (*RdV*, 37), a concept confirmed talking about the “service of authority” (*RdV*, 78).

In truth, Fr. Alberione had a little bit different vision, and certainly historically motivated. Thus is it inferred in the “charismatic history” of the Pauline Family, *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae*, quoted below:



**55** After this a succession of acts on the part of the Holy See that invited the Catholics to be at par with their new tasks; as many lazy types and inconsiderate spirits were observed; **Catholics and clergy aware and operating according to the papal directives.**

**56** These things and experiences, meditated before the Blessed Sacrament, matured the persuasion: **always, only and in all things, *what is of Rome*.** All had been a school and an orientation.

**57** **There is no salvation outside of it: no other proofs are needed to show that the Pope is the great beacon lit up by Jesus for humanity, for all centuries. The first members made a fourth vow [of] «obedience to the Pope in regard to the apostolate», put at the service of the Vicar of Jesus Christ.**

**115** The determining motives are clear: **we are in Rome, to *feel* better that the Pauline Family is at the service of the Holy See; to draw more directly the doctrine, the spirit, the activity of the apostolate from the Font, the Papacy;** Rome is the world's teacher, and yet she keeps the doors wide open for humanity; from Rome depart *everything sent* for every direction.

Some of these numbers of AD are mentioned in art. 44 of the *Constitution* of the Apostoline Sisters that also recall the canons of the CJC already indicated: «In particular, also in virtue of the vow of obedience, we are bound to obey the Pope».

As can be seen, only the SSP has a specific vow.

**Conclusion** – Everything that has been said, does not seem to us to be “something more” which, wanting, can be added to our charismatic treasure; it is just a simple given which is already a part of this “treasure” and which until now has not yet been studied and applied exhaustively.

SIF – Rom, 26 November 2013

***Feast of Blessed Alberione***