



ANNUAL LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
TO THE CONFRERES OF THE SOCIETY OF ST PAUL

APOSTLE COMMUNICATORS

For a culture of encounter

Dear Brothers,

the grace, peace and love of Jesus Master be with you all!

After having treated in the last two annual Letters some aspects concerning holiness and study, the one of this year wants to deepen the wheel of the apostolate of the “Pauline cart”, a theme very dear to us and to the entire Pauline Family. I begin the reflection with the words of our Founder, Blessed James Alberione, when he says, referring in particular to the press apostolate: *«Apostolate! This simple term sums up a whole mission, a whole program. An apostle is one who prays, one who speaks, one who acts, one who suffers, one who loves, one who believes, one who hopes. But an apostle, and much more so, is also one who writes, one who prints, one who spreads the word of God»*¹.

How it is well understood by this thought, apostolic action is not disconnected from the person of the apostle. Evangelization is the principal goal towards which our apostolic vocation tends². However, it is evident that the development and the fruitfulness of the apostolate depend not only on the adoption of the means that technical and scientific progress gradually bring to the service of the Gospel but, above all, from the person of the apostle who carries out the mission: *«The apostolate is a fruit, and the fruit comes from the plant: if the plant is healthy, the fruit will be abundant; but if the plant is sick, the fruit will either be missing or scarce»*³.

In this perspective, we can say that the development of the apostolate – that is, its charismatic understanding, vision of horizons, content, creativity, pastoral sensitivity, organization, methodology of work, audacity, etc. – depends on the person of the apostle, even when external situations can be adverse. In fact, there is no institutional renewal or apostolic thrust if there is no revitalization of the individual person: and it is equally evident that there is no such regeneration if we do not build quality communication with God, with others, with oneself, with creation, etc.

¹ James Alberione, *The Publishing Apostolate (PA)*, Society of St Paul, General House, Rome, 1998, no. 5.

² Cf. *Documents of the Special General Chapter 1969-1971*, Society of St Paul, General House, Rome, 1984, no. 71.

³ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, Pauline Editions, Cinisello Balsamo, 1992, no. 961.

This Letter wishes to go beyond the technical-instrumental perspective of communication and, consequently, of our apostolate⁴. We are aware that the Pauline mission consists in spreading the Gospel through the instruments of social communication – from which derives also the speaking of everything in a Christian way⁵ – and that we must always be attentive to the signs of the times in order to adopt whatever rapid and effective means that human intelligence makes available for the greater good of men⁶. However, the identity of the Pauline does not coincide only with his work in the specific environment of communication, but also with his understanding as a “man of communication”⁷, as a person of true relationships, which has in the dimension of communication a constitutive part of his being and of his acting.

Considering that this theme is very broad and complex, it is our intention to address it from a very particular angle, that of a “culture of encounter”⁸ that requires to establish healthy and fruitful human relationships, nourished by the heart⁹ of the single person. In fact, one who has love, loves; one who hates hate; one who is poisonous spreads poison; one who is joyful sows joy; one who is optimistic communicates positive things, and so on. One who believes that it is possible to arrive at a “culture of encounter”, practises a communication that helps to build it.

This topic, while on the one hand goes to the root of our current difficulties, at the same time it also offers a regenerative path to us “*apostle communicators and consecrated persons*”¹⁰. In this sense we will try to present a reflection on the communication that helps us to compare this reality with our identity as “Pauline Publishers” (that is, as men of communication!). We expect each one of us – individually and in community – to take this theme seriously, to improve the quality of one’s relationships (*ad intra* and *ad extra*).

Certainly, these reflections must be integrated into all the contexts of Pauline life: community life, spirituality, religious vows, piety, formation (“studiosità”), interpersonal relationships, administration... And considering that everything must be in harmony with our mission.

1. Communication for a “culture of encounter”

It is certain that the meaning of the expression “culture of encounter”, as Pope Francis is using it, requires a very precise hermeneutics to bring out all its potential and its fruitfulness.

⁴ It is opportune to bear in mind the Annual Letter of 2014, written by Father Silvio Sassi, *Evangelizing in communication with communication*, in which he proposes the reading and updating of the *Press Apostolate*, presenting in an organic form the vision of Blessed James Alberione regarding the apostolate and the person of the apostle.

⁵ Cf. James Alberione, *Abundantes divitiae (AD)*, Society of St Paul, General House, Rome, 1998, nos. 87-88.

⁶ Cf. *The Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St Paul*, art. 2.1.

⁷ “The Pauline, Man of Communication” was the theme of the VI General Chapter of the Society of St Paul, held at Ariccia from 15 March to 16 April 1992.

⁸ From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis is continuously urging the Church to live and spread a true “culture of encounter” in the world, a privileged way to promote and achieve lasting peace among peoples. In harmony with the Pope, we are also called to give our cooperation with concrete actions and initiatives.

⁹ «The Bible uses the heart to describe our real intentions, the things we truly seek and desire, apart from all appearances. “Man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). God wants to speak to our hearts (cf. Hos 2:16); there he desires to write his law (cf. Jer 31:33). In a word, he wants to give us a new heart», in Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 83.

¹⁰ Cf. *Declaration of the X General Chapter of the Society of St Paul*.

We can broadly say that it is in opposition to a fragmented and dispersive culture, marked by individualism, self-sufficiency and narcissism, or that culture characterized by a set of ideas, behaviours, beliefs, lifestyles, etc., that destroy man and his relationships. It contrasts with the culture of the encounter the counterculture of exclusion, prejudice, squander and indifference. On the contrary, the culture of encounter is that which arises from the communication practiced in terms of neighbourliness¹¹, where respect, dialogue, inclusion and collaboration are present¹² in view of the common good.

The culture of encounter is not only something to be disseminated through our means of apostolate but, above all, it is a reality to be put into practice starting from our interpersonal relationships. We ourselves must first be challenged to make our contribution to promote this culture starting from the small daily gestures within our communities and our apostolic structures. The current papal magisterium repeatedly insists that the culture of encounter must be at the heart of the Church's mission and, we can add without fear of contradiction, even of the Pauline apostolate, which finds in communication the central aspect of its charism.

Communication, a reality without which it is impossible to live, is essential in the construction of this culture. In fact, expressing oneself, talking to each other and sharing our life with another are some of the elements that define us as human beings. Communication is the natural means to get in touch with the other, it is the horizon that we all desire and of which, at the same time, we are sometimes afraid, because approaching the other can be difficult. Only communication is able to manage this ambivalent relationship between the self and the other¹³.

At the origin of the word communication there is the term "communion"¹⁴. Communication is always a search for the other and of sharing. It has the capacity to break the barriers we build around ourselves, the closed circle of our self-sufficiency and allows us to look for the other, to recognize his otherness, his specificity, his being different in relation to our person. In this communicative process, listening is an essential element because the effectiveness of communication itself does not depend only on what is said but, above all, on how much and how we listen.

Communicating, even before speaking, requires knowing how to listen, an attitude that supposes the willingness to understand the expectations of the speaker, to enter his world. *«Listening means paying attention, wanting to understand, to value, to respect and to ponder what the other person says. [...] Listening also means being able to share questions and doubts, to journey side by side, to banish all claims to absolute power and to put our abilities and gifts at the service of the common good»*¹⁵. The restless rhythm of today, marked by so much noise and as-

¹¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Message for the 48th World Communications Day: "Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter"*, 24 January 2014.

¹² Cf. Santiago Madrigal Terraraz, *Unity prevails over conflict. Pope Francis and ecumenism*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Rome, 2017, p. 44.

¹³ Cf. Dominique Wolton, *Pensar la comunicación*, Prometeo Libros, Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 42.

¹⁴ The first meaning of the word "communication", which appeared in the twelfth century, comes from Latin and refers to the idea of communion, sharing. The second sense appears in the sixteenth century and refers to the concept of transmission, diffusion. It is related to the development of techniques, starting with the press. Cf. Dominique Wolton, *Pensar la comunicación*, op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Message for the 50th World Communications Day: "Communication and Mercy: a Fruitful Encounter"*, 24 January 2016.

sociated with certain individualistic tendencies, does not always help us to listen. If we do not listen, what will we say? From this situation are born – and we are then bitterly aware of them in reality – so many conflicts that arise from interpersonal relationships lacking in listening.

There is silence that is connected to listening. In fact, it is necessary to be silent to listen. By keeping silent, the other person is allowed to speak, to express himself. But silence is also a great opportunity for us not to remain tied only to our words or our ideas without an appropriate comparison. *«When word and silence become mutually exclusive, communication breaks down, either because it gives rise to confusion or because, on the contrary, it creates an atmosphere of coldness; when they complement one another, however, communication acquires value and meaning. Silence is an integral element of communication; in its absence, words rich in content cannot exist. In silence, we are better able to listen to and understand ourselves; ideas come to birth and acquire depth; we understand with greater clarity what it is we want to say and what we expect from others; and we choose how to express ourselves»*¹⁶.

Sometimes we try to solve the problems that pertain to the mission by facing the consequences and not going directly to the causes. In other words, we forget that the root of certain difficulties, even at the apostolic level, often lies in the lack of quality interpersonal communication that includes listening and silence. It is urgent for everyone to communicate well, that is, to adopt those attitudes that help us to be closer, to know each other better and to be more united.

2. The Pauline, man of communication

Citing the Founder, at the beginning we said that the apostolate is a fruit, that the fruit comes from the plant, and that the plant is each of us as persons. For us Paulines, the fruit depends largely on how we live our Christian and charismatic identity, because it is in this way – obviously associated with other personal and cultural data and our own life experience – that we communicate with our confreres, with our lay collaborators, with the interlocutors of our apostolate. It is with this identity that we are present in the “culture of communication” and we are called to promote the encounter.

It will not be possible to fully develop here all the elements that define the identity of the Pauline. However, the first aspect that we can underline is that, like all Christians, first of all, the Pauline is a human person with his lights and shadows, called to let the grace of Baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness¹⁷. Such holiness consists in the love of God, who first loved us, and in perfect union with Christ, who is the source and from which he receives the impulse to love of neighbour¹⁸, lived concretely in the service to the brothers.

In this human and Christian reality open to the action of God’s grace, we try to respond to our particular vocation, characterized by at least two properties. The first is the identity marked by the profession of the evangelical counsels through the vows: *«Celibacy, for love of the Kingdom, embraced by those who “lose” their own life for Christ and the Gospel. Poverty as freedom from one’s possessive self, both as regards what we have and what we are. So as to be*

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 46th World Communications Day: “Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization”*, 24 January 2012.

¹⁷ Cf. Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 15.

¹⁸ Cf. *Documents of the Special General Chapter 1969-1971*, op. cit., no. 4.

able to look people in the eye knowing we are free from interests and prejudices, free of the fear of losing time and strength, of being judged. Obedience as an expression of belonging to one's institution. More precisely, to the mandate received, one's personal and community mission»¹⁹.

The other aspect refers to our reality as an “editor”, a characteristic connatural to our identity and strongly connected with communication, a mark that does not only define our doing but also our being, according to the sense that we have inherited from our Founder. The text of Blessed Alberione who interprets the theological foundations of the press apostolate in relation to evangelization understood as “edition” (which we can understand as “drawing from oneself to give to others”) is a source of inspiration for us: «*The Heavenly Father ab æterno is the Editor of the Son. [...] The Divine Son, the Editor of the Gospel as Master Way, Truth and Life. [...] The Holy Spirit is the Author and the Editor of the Holy Scriptures. [...] Mary is the Editor of the humanized Word. [...] Edition and Publisher is the Church. [...] Mary is also a Mother, Teacher and Queen of Editors and editions. [...] Saint Paul: the most abundant writer in the New Testament*»²⁰.

The Pauline, living the commitments of Baptism and of the consecrated life, inspired by Jesus (and by the Trinity), in Mary and in Saint Paul, is called to be “editor” and to do so through an institutional charism that is a function of evangelization. «*The Pauline who realizes this task is not only a “professional” of communication, but an “apostle”: a person who, inserted in the community, lives the experience of faith in Christ following the example of Saint Paul, and becomes a “witness” of his experience in the forms and languages of present-day communication. Blessed Alberione synthesizes the profile of the Paulines: “neither businessmen nor industrialists, but a Society of Apostles*»²¹. Let us recall that the term “apostle” means “sent”²², he who announces a message. As an apostle, the Pauline Editor is called to evangelize or, in the words of our Founder, to exude God from all his pores: with his words, his works, his prayers, his gestures, his attitudes: in public and in private, from his whole being²³. He is called to be true man of communication of God.

Considering that «*the works of God are done by the men of God*»²⁴, it is also opportune to underline that, in order to live this identity fully, the Pauline Editor is invited to look for all the means²⁵ and the time needed to keep in constant listening to God, in a vital communication with him, «*if not, one who is empty, what will he say?*»²⁶. In this context, we can highlight the Eucharistic celebration²⁷, the “Visit” and the meditation of the Word (especially the Gospels and the Letters of Saint Paul²⁸), the examination of conscience, etc. They are all

¹⁹ Renato Perino, *Apostolic Organization and the Use of Multimedia in the Light of Priority III*, Rome, 1992, p. 19.

²⁰ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. *919.

²¹ Silvio Sassi, *Intervention at the 9th General Assembly of CIDEP* (São Paulo - Brazil, 11-18 November 2013), in *San Paolo*, Year 89 (April 2014), no. 445, p. 45.

²² The word “apostle” derives from the Greek “apostéllō” (to send). Cf. “Apostles” in *Theological Themes of the Bible*, edited by Romano Penna – Giacomo Perego – Gianfranco Ravasi, St Pauls, Cinisello Balsamo, 2010, p. 85.

²³ Cf. James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei (UPS) IV*, Society of St Paul, General House, Rome, 1998, no. 277-278.

²⁴ James Alberione, *Carissimi in san Paolo (CISP)*, Pauline Editions, Rome, 1971, p. 210.

²⁵ Cf. James Alberione, *PA*, op. cit., nos. 94, 87, 102.

²⁶ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit. no. 967.

²⁷ It is worth recalling the words of Blessed James Alberione: «*The Eucharist and the Bible form the apostle of the press. Let these two things be inseparable and intertwined in your hearts*», in *Haec meditare II*, I (1941), p. 80.

²⁸ Cf. James Alberione, *CISP*, op. cit., p. 168.

“spaces of communication”, of meeting with the Master to become then his communicators and, consequently, true promoters of dialogue, of communion, and of encounter.

3. Looking at our reality of being communicators

After presenting some tracts that identify the Pauline, we can ask ourselves: in practice how do we live our identity as “men of communication”? We are not referring only to our specific mission of communicating with technical means but, first of all, to that communication between persons.

Certainly, the community and the environment in which we carry out our apostolate are the first places to benefit from authentic communication. We all agree that healthy living environments allow us to achieve what our Constitutions propose us as a style of life, when they indicate that the purpose of our Congregation is achieved through an eminently communitarian apostolate, where all members cultivate fraternal collaboration and friendship and help each other to correspond to the common vocation²⁹.

They are beautiful proposals but we cannot hide the reality! We must sincerely ask ourselves if we live or, at least, if we try to live satisfactory interpersonal communication, as we expect from the Pauline Editor to build “encounter” and achieve “fraternal collaboration”. It is true that there are confreres who strive along this path. However, looking at our reality we honestly see that we still have a long way to go in this direction, especially where there are obstacles that still prevent good communication.

In this regard, we wish to underline the difficulties that arise especially in those environments in which predominates a certain industry and corporate logic rather than the proposal of the Gospel. These are the places where most problems are created in interpersonal relationships, with serious consequences for community life and, therefore, for the apostolate itself. I refer to those spaces where a radical hierarchical-corporate structure is blindly imposed, moved by an unbridled search of efficiency, transforming the relationships that there should be between brothers in merely functional relationships, many times cold because they are centred almost exclusively on results: they are only the harbingers of conflict and suffering.

Here is one reflection, indeed a worrisome and interesting observation, on the influence of business in the consecrated life: «*The law of the market is churning out men made according to the law of the jungle. And we meet men and women, men and women religious, in search of personal success, who are aggressive, insecure, disoriented. People without ideals, without hopes or utopias, who seek comfort and security and who live their lives without valid motivations. Business is risking their hearts. It teaches them to compete, to calculate; but not to be people, especially creative people*»³⁰. How sad is the consecrated life where there is no love, no gratuitousness, no true communication, no prophecy, no encounter!

It is natural that we must confront ourselves with business and with the laws of commerce and industry; it is evident that we must organize well the different areas and sectors of the apostolate unified in a common project; it is equally necessary that we must respect

²⁹ Cf. *The Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St Paul*, art. 15.

³⁰ Carlos Del Valle, *Religious Life and Society, in Consecration and Service*, no. 11 (November 2002). Available on the net: <http://www.usminazionale.it/11-2002/delvalle.htm>

the roles and be attentive to labour laws, etc. But we must at the same time remember that all these things are actually means, never the end, and on this, our Founder has already warned us³¹. History teaches us that where business criteria enter instead of the Gospel – that set of values that includes love, service, fraternity, mercy, justice, peace... –, sooner or later, the ruin is certain.

These observations interrogate us and must lead us to verify ourselves also on other aspects, for example, on the predominant communication model within our apostolic organization. Is it, still by chance, inspired by the model inherited from the mass media (press, radio, TV...), in which a vertical, hierarchical, authoritarian, depersonalized communication predominates, based on the model of one who speaks in a unidirectional way to everyone, etc.?

In addition to human relationships within communities and apostolic structures, it is also necessary to verify what is the level of our openness with the universal and local Church, with the people (our interlocutors or recipients) situated in their cultural, social and economic, political and religious context, with the different problems in which the life of humanity is at stake (ecology, for example), etc. We have to see to what extent the option to reach the distant ones, the non-Christians, the poor... is, in fact, a reality in our publishing and diffusion initiatives. One can easily see that overly closed communities and apostolic activities – and, even worse, self-referential ones – hurt both the people who live and work there as well as the apostolic zeal.

In general, I believe that we have not yet entered, as we would expect, in the communication model that arises from digital networks, an environment that, despite having some problematic aspects, nevertheless presents a space open to interactivity, participation, collaboration, to horizontal and shared communication. At this point, it is appropriate to remember what was said in the *2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*: «We cannot therefore live on illusions. The digital media are available; the internet exists and swiftly transforms itself, adapting itself to the changeable needs of the persons on the planetary level. Thus, the net changes our societies, and we cannot fool ourselves that it does not modify the Church, and even our way of thinking and living in the Christian community»³². The change we live in is not purely technological, but creates and inserts us into “new” relationships: it plunges us into the net!

I urge everyone, then, to look carefully at our communities and our apostolic environments, to see to what extent the ideal of the Pauline as a “man of communication” – which creates communion and promotes encounter – is lived on different levels. In order that we can take steps forward in the growth of the effectiveness of communication, let us seek together in our spirituality two references that can surely help us on this journey.

4. Jesus, Master in communication

The renewal of thought and action and their orientation towards a “culture of encounter” concerns the very structure of our human nature, which is clearly oriented to the relationship, to the discovery of the other, to interaction, to dialogue, as we have mentioned above. All these aspects, fully human, are present in the person of Jesus.

³¹ Cf. James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 1066.

³² Dario Edoardo Viganò, *What models of Communication the Church Needs in the World Today?*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*, Ariccia, 16-21 October 2017, p. 99.

With Pauline language, we can say that Jesus is our Teacher also in that kind of communication that leads to the encounter with the other and that we see, in the first place, emerge in the Most Holy Trinity, which is a communion of love and an archetype of communication. All the action of the Trinity in the plan of salvation is a “generative communication”, creative, becoming for us a source, model and reference both as a type of communication and as a mode of relationship. This Trinitarian horizon of communion encompasses us all and stimulates us to live in love and fraternal sharing, certain that where there is love, there is God³³.

The face of God is revealed in Jesus through his Word, who becomes himself liberator and redeemer for all of humanity, in his preaching and in his action, by means of a communication that has love for its motor. Jesus shows us that we are all loved by God; and, in turn, it is expected that we will all correspond, both in our relationship with Him and with our confreres: *«From this everyone will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another»*, Jesus said (Jh 13:35).

The openness to love manifested in Jesus is an indispensable path to free oneself from an isolated conscience and from self-absorption (cf. EG 8). Only by letting ourselves be possessed by his love is it possible to break any kind of individualistic, business-like, narcissistic attitude that, combined with many other destructive behaviours, prevents the construction of good relationships and the actualization of encounter. In fact, the life of Jesus is the whole expression of communication: with the Father, with the Holy Spirit, with himself, with his disciples, with those he found on his way, especially the marginalized and the suffering. With concrete gestures of communication he conveyed listening, silence, welcome, respect, mercy, compassion, patience...

In fact, *«often Jesus’ teaching took the form of parables and vivid stories expressing profound truths in simple, everyday terms. Not only his words but also his deeds, especially his miracles, were acts of communication, pointing to his identity and manifesting the power of God. In his communications he showed respect for his listeners, sympathy for their situation and needs, compassion for their suffering, and resolute determination to tell them what they needed to hear, in a way that would command their attention and help them receive the message, without coercion or compromise, deception or manipulation and help them receive the message, without coercion or compromise, deception or manipulation»*³⁴.

The apostle, as we have already mentioned, is one who is “sent”, but before that, he is called to be an “expert” of Jesus³⁵, also in the field of communication. This means that it is necessary to establish himself in Jesus Master Way (will), Truth (mind) and Life (feeling)³⁶ in order to learn from him to communicate constructively and positively. In this perspective the apostle is, above all, a “disciple” who learns from the Master and who imitates him in using quality communication. Therefore, looking at Jesus in the perspective of communication, we need to reflect to what extent our faith in Him is an active faith – which expresses itself, that is, in gestures and attitudes of constructive communication and founded on real relationships – through love (cf. Gal 5:6).

³³ Cf. Pope Francis, *Angelus during the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity*, 22 May 2016.

³⁴ Pontifical Council of Social Communications, *Ethics in Social Communications*, 4 June 2000, no. 32.

³⁵ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 22 March 2006.

³⁶ Cf. James Alberione, *UPS I*, op. cit., no. 187.

5. Paul, Apostle of communion

Another reference in the search for constructive communication is offered to us by Saint Paul. But before going into this topic, let us remember that Father Alberione is very explicit in presenting the Apostle as a prototype for the life of the Pauline: «*The original is Jesus Christ; the form is Saint Paul [...] and we must form ourselves in Him. To live, that is, to think, to work, to be zealous, as he has thought, how he has worked, how he has been zealous for the salvation of souls, as he has prayed. To be really Paulines. Paulines!*»³⁷. In other words: “forming oneself in Paul”³⁸.

Forming ourselves in Paul certainly presupposes considering not only the content of his message and his apostolic zeal, the means used and the pastoral strategies adopted by him, but also of looking at his lifestyle in the concrete and daily contact with people and his ability to involve and to create human relationships, both with men and women, aspects that we do not always consider, as our Founder already underlined: «*Many times Saint Paul is considered only in his great apostolic activity; but this started from the heart, from his great love for Jesus Christ, for the Gospel, for the souls. It is then understood how he could be “everything to everyone”. [...]»*³⁹.

Undoubtedly, the experience that profoundly marked the life of Saint Paul was the real and living encounter with Christ, the one who had been crucified (cf. 1 Cor 1:22-24). In that unforgettable meeting on the road to Damascus, «*the Risen Christ appears as a brilliant light and speaks to Saul, transforms his thinking and his entire life. The dazzling radiance of the Risen Christ blinds him; thus what was his inner reality is also outwardly apparent, his blindness to the truth, to the light that is Christ. And then his definitive “yes” to Christ in Baptism restores his sight and makes him really see [...] This expanded his heart and made it open to all*»⁴⁰. Paul himself affirms with conviction that he is “an apostle by vocation” and “chosen to proclaim the Gospel of God” (cf. Rom 1:1), because he has proven on himself first the experience of salvation. Without this event – and consequently without listening to what Jesus told him – there would not have been his conversion or, in any case, the radical change of his life.

From the encounter with Jesus, Paul discovers the true face of God, and becomes himself an instrument of communication (Acts 9:15). Therefore, «*provided Christ is announced (Phil 1:18) Paul is always traveling by land and by sea, in mountainous and deserted regions, facing every kind of danger. The horizon of his mission is the world. Around the important centres, the big cities and the commercial nodes, from which the irradiation of his message is easier*»⁴¹. This universal openness draws our attention to the value that Saint Paul, in his apostolic activity, gives to interpersonal relationships, to the communities, to the encounter, the fruit of his ability to communicate.

But in what sense is Paul “communicator”? Certainly, we cannot adequately understand it starting from a distorted conception of communicator, more like a “chatterer” or a person who makes theatrics and spectacles as weapons of convincing others, thanks to the use of rhetorical art and of appearance. Indeed, «*from his Letters, we know that Paul was far from being a good speaker; on the contrary, he shared with Moses and Jeremiah a lack of oratory skill. “His*

³⁷ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 653.

³⁸ Cf. James Alberione, *Primavera paolina (PP)*, Pauline Editions, Rome, 1983, p. 216.

³⁹ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 644.

⁴⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 3 September 2008.

⁴¹ Bruno Maggioni, *The God of Paul and the Gospel of Grace*, Daughters of St Paul, Milan, 1996, pp. 14-15.

bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account” (II Cor 10:10), his adversaries said of him. The extraordinary apostolic results that he was able to achieve cannot, therefore, be attributed to brilliant rhetoric or refined apologetic and missionary strategies. The success of his apostolate depended above all on his personal involvement in proclaiming the Gospel with total dedication to Christ; a dedication that feared neither risk, difficulty nor persecution [...]»⁴².

Together with the aspects linked to the “content” deriving from his experience of personal encounter with Christ, Paul is a great communicator inasmuch as he is also a true promoter of communion (communication!). Even when, in his pastoral work, he had clashes with someone, these incidents have never been a reason to divide or break the communion. Reading his letters, particularly chapter 16 of the Letter to the Romans, we find a series of names that belonged to the vast circle of his relationships. He «*is a builder of communion: not only communion within each single community, between member and member, group and group, but also between Jewish communities and Hellenistic communities*»⁴³.

When we talk about “communion”, we must be careful because often this term is seen and understood as something abstract and is, therefore, devalued. Paul, rightly, was able to move from the mystical, ontological and ideal level of communion to the practical one of interpersonal, simple, ordinary, everyday communication, which certainly stemmed from his ability to listen. «*By meeting and listening to others, Paul draws himself, his ultimate vocation, the truth of his missionary mandate. Announcing he announces, and listening, he is listened to*»⁴⁴.

Listening to his letters have also been born which seek, in the light of the “Jesus event”, to respond to the concrete problems of the people and communities with whom he had contact. In other words, the content of Saint Paul’s proclamation is not born in the laboratory but from practice, from his relationships and, obviously, from his letting himself be guided as a docile instrument of the Spirit of the Risen Lord. In “listening communication”, Paul is a man totally dedicated to evangelization, without other interests than those of Jesus, convinced that the Gospel is a word not only to be announced, but also to be made credible with one’s own life. Such way of life makes us think how much we Paulines imitate our “father” even in seeking a communication that is a real tool to promote encounter and create communion.

6. Breaking self-absorption

As we saw very succinctly, Jesus – Master in communication! – and Paul – his faithful disciple – are two indispensable references on our journey in search of a communication that leads to encounter. Observing the path made by them, we learn from both that if we want a communication that helps us to improve our relationships, we need to be “outgoing” people.

We are in the Church and with the Church; we want to be a Congregation that “goes forth”⁴⁵. Obviously, in order to “go out to all” we must first “come out of ourselves”. This requires a change of mentality, the abandonment of prejudices and of the attachment to one’s own ideas, distancing from every individualism and business-like vision of people and of

⁴² Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Basilica of St Paul outside the Walls*, 28 June 2007.

⁴³ Bruno Maggioni, *The God of Paul*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴⁴ Giuseppe Mazza, *Saint Paul, Communicator Model*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*, op. cit., p. 212.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Chapter Declaration of the X General Chapter*.

the apostolate, the liberation from any resignation, etc. The culture of encounter, on which we are insisting in this Letter, «demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive»⁴⁶, that is, to “go out” in order to “welcome”.

Regarding the scope of our specific mission, the Founder already insisted on the need to break self-absorption to go out with the goal of reaching everyone when, for example, he stated that «Jesus Christ taught us not to wait for people, but to seek them out»⁴⁷. Today, more than ever, we must look for people. But this is not enough. It is urgent to free oneself from that paralyzing self-absorption mentality that usually tries to justify inertia with the statement “we have always done it this way”. Regarding this, the same Blessed Alberione already warned: «So do not think to say: “we have always done it this way”. With the passing of the years we must adapt ourselves to the conditions of the time in which we live»⁴⁸.

The same current teaching of the universal Church is insisting on taking up “pastoral ministry in a missionary style”⁴⁹ that rightly demands to abandon the convenient criterion of “it has always been so”. The Church urges us to be bold and creative in the task of rethinking the objectives, structures, style and evangelizing methods of our communities, warning that the identification of ends without adequate communitarian research of the means to achieve them is condemned to translate into mere illusion⁵⁰.

Moreover, the current time challenges us to face the digital world, which is not a world parallel to the real world. In digital highways we find, just like in the streets and squares of our cities, concrete people with their strengths and weaknesses, with their truths and their contradictions. «The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people»⁵¹, an open field, therefore, to generate relationships and promote the culture of encounter.

Precisely in this context, in the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers, it was clear that «the publisher of the future will produce relationships. The network has given individuals the opportunity to express themselves autonomously, independently, uninterruptedly, and freely connect with each other. In this way, it has disrupted the concept of “mass” understood as a set of consumers of the same product, creating an ecosystem populated by innumerable communities in its place. This is the true cultural revolution of our century. A revolution that does not have the features of a technological monster, but which is the result of a vital breath towards sharing and sociability that resides in the human soul since the birth of our species»⁵².

In this journey of openness, we cannot forget that the institutions of the Pauline Family, despite the variety of apostolates, belong to a single “tree” that has its roots in the Eucharist.

⁴⁶ Pope Francis, *Message for the 48th World Communications Day*, op. cit.

⁴⁷ James Alberione, *PA*, op. cit., no. 387.

⁴⁸ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 347.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 35: «A pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing».

⁵⁰ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 33.

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Message for the 48th World Communications Day*, op. cit.

⁵² Federico Badaloni, *Rethinking the Role of the Publisher Today*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*, op. cit., p. 191.

Let us recall that *«the Eucharist is the one from which the Pauline Family was born. And, if it was born as such, it has to live so»*⁵³. The Eucharist, if lived in depth, generates communion, sharing, and service. The search for encounter and the overcoming of everything that impedes its development, beginning with our communities and within the Pauline Family itself, is undoubtedly a modern and concrete form of witnessing to the Gospel and of practicing prophecy in a world marked by the tendency to dispersion and fragmentation.

7. Conclusion

Dear brothers, the challenges of our apostolate are so many. There are those concerning the works to be conducted with the mass media; there are those that push us towards digital communication on the net. Two realities that, however, must always be more integrated with each other. To these, we add the new initiatives that emerge in some Circumscriptions, fruit of creativity and audacity, such as the cultural centres, the Pauline Centres of Studies in Communication, the various activities in the biblical field, the bookstores as a centre of evangelization and culture, etc.

But the biggest challenge is to renew the Pauline Publisher as a “man of communication”. It is with this identity and with all that this expression means that we want to be present in the “culture of communication”; a “publisher” who seeks to integrate the apostolate with prayer, with study (understood as “studiosità”), with community life, etc. and that he would strive to be a true builder of a culture of encounter. The whole person for a more fruitful apostolate: mind, will, heart⁵⁴. Everything else depends on this integral and integrated life!

However, it is opportune to bear in mind that an essential element in achieving this renewal is our personal conversion, which presupposes a change in the way of thinking and acting, enlightened by the Spirit, on which the renewal of our communities and apostolic structures depends⁵⁵. Our Founder insisted on this: *«The true zeal of reform always begins with ourselves, so do not listen to all those who speak of reforms – reforms in the clergy, in society, in Catholic associations – if you do not see before that these souls begin by reforming themselves»*⁵⁶.

A conversion is necessary that leads to abandoning thoughts and attitudes full of resignation. Indeed, *«one of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, “sourpusses”. Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents»*⁵⁷.

We can ask many questions about the topic we have developed. Among these, we can put some: what concrete contribution (at a personal, community, formative and apostolic level) each of us can offer for the construction of a culture of encounter? Is Jesus the first reference for quality communication for us? Can we create “communion” and work as a team with confreres and lay collaborators, and also within the Pauline Family, just as the

⁵³ James Alberione, *To the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master (APD) IX*, 1964, Pauline Editions, Rome, 1986, no. 203.

⁵⁴ James Alberione, *AD*, op. cit., no. 22.

⁵⁵ Cf. *General Objective*, in the *Acts of the X General Chapter of the Society of St Paul*.

⁵⁶ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 169.

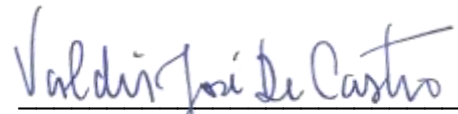
⁵⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 85.

Apostle Paul did in his pastoral work? What are the concrete difficulties and how to overcome them? On a personal, community and apostolic level, are we open to the reality of God's people, to their problems and their expectations? What steps have we already taken and which ones remain to be done? What thoughts and works of Blessed Alberione can we remember to motivate our journey of openness? What new apostolic initiatives can we propose to respond to today's needs, especially when we consider communication on the net?⁵⁸

May Jesus, Master in communication, help us to do everything for the Gospel in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, under the gaze of Mary Queen of the Apostles and through the intercession of Blessed James Alberione, never abandoning the commitment to build together, with faith and hope, a culture of encounter.

Faternally

Rome, 6 May 2018
VI Sunday of Easter


Father Valdir José De Castro, SSP
Superior General

⁵⁸ In this reflection, it is opportune to consider also the contents of the *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers* and of the document *Editorial Guidelines. Identity, contents and recipients of the Pauline apostolate*.