



## LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE CONFRERES OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PAUL

***“I DO ALL FOR THE GOSPEL” (1Cor 9,23)***  
***In love, in communion and with courage.***

Dearest brothers,

*Grace and peace from the Risen Lord!*

With Easter joy I write to you this first letter, two months after having assumed the service that the Congregation has entrusted to me during the X General Chapter. Notwithstanding all our limitations, together as General Government we are here to serve and to carry out the animation of the Congregation, trusting above all in the grace that comes to us from Jesus Master and also confiding in the collaboration of each one of you.

The last annual letters written by Fr. Silvio Sassi have helped us to deepen our charism and celebrate the Centenary of foundation of our Congregation (and start of the Pauline Family) in light of the principal works of our Founder. Through the wealth of the historical and charismatic elements that have been offered to us, we have made a journey that have led us, among other things, to face the challenges of evangelization “through” and “in” communication, deepen the meaning of “written preaching side by side with oral preaching” and assume with courage the “integrated project of a new evangelization” using the means of communication that we have at our disposal and those that human progress challenges us to utilize.

Through this letter I intend to invite you to continue the reflection, that is, see our life and our mission in the perspective of the theme of the X General Chapter: “*I do all for the Gospel*” (1Cor 9,23). Who knows if we can make of this theme a true program, so as to illumine all the dimensions of the Pauline life! The *Final Document* – with its premise, objective, priorities and action lines – is for us an outline to follow in the next six years. However, this does not prevent that our hearts be open to the signs of the times, to other initiatives that have not been thought about and that the new needs will be able to submit to our decision.

We believe, with our Founder, that “one who builds upon the Gospel and for the Gospel will raise up an edifice that will not fall, notwithstanding the winds and the tempests.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, as apostles-communicators, **there is no sense in doing something without the Gospel and without the Gospel becoming in us, first of all, a “style of life.”**

## **Easter in the Year of the Consecrated Life**

I invite you, dear brothers, to situate the message of this letter in light of the Pasch of the Lord and of the paschal time that is opening before us as a moment of grace. We live an opportune occasion to unite us to the Risen Christ and to create with Him – in faith, among ourselves and with all humanity – a communion that fills us with life and hope, makes us see that “*life is stronger than death. Good is stronger than what is bad. Love is stronger than hate. The truth is stronger than falsehood. The darkness of days past disappears at the moment when Jesus rises from the sepulchre and He himself becomes the pure light of God.*”<sup>2</sup> Let us be brightened by this Light!

Another important aspect is that of the Year of Consecrated Life, in relation to which the magisterium of Pope Francis insists on *joy*. For me it seems opportune that we live this Year in the spirit of the Easter of the Lord, since rightly **it is from the joyous experience of the risen Jesus that mission is born**. It is from the meeting of the disciples with Him that the announcement is born. It is the Risen Jesus who says to his disciples: “*Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16,15).

In fact, the true encounter with the Lord opens us to our brothers, puts us in motion, pushes us to come out of our self-obsession, launches us into mission. As we are reminded by one of the documents emanating from the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life for the animation of the Year of Consecrated Life, «*our relation with the Lord is not static, neither is it intimist: One who puts Christ at the center of his life “decentralizes” himself! The more you unite yourself to Jesus and He becomes the center of your life, the more He makes you go out of yourself, he decentralizes you and opens you to others. We are not in the center, we are so to say, “shifted,” at the service of Christ and of the Church*»<sup>3</sup>.

## **Evangelizing, in joy, using communication and in communication**

Speaking about evangelization done by us Paulines, the recent Declaration of the X General Chapter talks exactly about “*evangelizing today in joy as apostles-*

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<sup>1</sup> Giacomo Alberione, *Anima e corpo per il Vangelo*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan), Edizioni San Paolo, 2005, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, *Omelia, Sabato Santo*, 7 April 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rallegratevi*. Circular letter for consecrated persons. From the Magisterium of Pope Francis, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014, n. 5.

*communicators and as consecrated persons.*" As we utilize all the languages of communication, we are called to renew every day our faith and commitment to live and announce the Gospel in a culture closely marked by internet communication.

In an ever more globalized world thanks especially to technological means, all humanity is gradually entering this environment. It is certain that the "culture of communication" is not a field of evangelization exclusively ours. Moreover, we notice ever more frequently that there are institutions within the Church that do wonderful things in the field of evangelization using various languages of communication.

**What, then, distinguishes us from those who do what we also do** and sometimes more than us? The answer is that **all that we do**, we do as "Paulines," with a lifestyle that is "Pauline," in light of the charism and spirituality inherited from our Founder; **we do it as consecrated persons**, starting from the experience of community life. If we lose these – and other elements – that characterize us, if we lose our "Pauline color," we shall certainly be frustrated and sad consecrated persons.

Because of this, after the celebration of the Centenary of foundation of our Congregation, I invite you to take up again and revive each day, in joy and in hope, the gift of life and vocation that we have received. As Fr. Alberione said: *"Happy souls, a happy family, a happy apostolate. Souls that are happy make themselves holy even more quickly."*<sup>4</sup>

Bearing in mind the Pauline consecrated life, we can renew, in a Paschal spirit, our commitment to evangelize through communication and in communication. Among so many aspects that could be emphasized, in this point of view, I take in consideration **three elements that ought to be awakened ever more in each of you: love, communion and courage.**

### **Evangelizing "with love" through communication and in communication**

The Gospel that we are called to live and announce as Paulines, first of all, is the good news that is born of the power of love, because God is love and one who remains in love remains in God (1Jn 4,16). Love is at the base of the life of those who follow Jesus. Discipleship, not only of the religious but also of all Christians, is rightly born of a personal decision to listen to the Lord who gives a new commandment to love one another: *"From this all will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for each other"* (Jn 13,35).

Saint Augustine reminds us that Jesus has defined the fullness of love with which we must love one another by these words: *"Nobody has greater love than this: to give one's life for his friends"* (Jn 15,13). Christ *"has given his life for us; therefore we too must give our life for our brothers"* (1Jn 3,16) by truly loving each other, as he has loved us, to

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<sup>4</sup> Giacomo Alberione, *Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1946-1949*, Rome, FSP-Casa Generalizia, 2000, p. 502.

the point of giving his life for us.<sup>5</sup> This means that **what distinguishes the disciples of Jesus is, first of all, the love that they show among them.**

We are Paulines and we cannot forget that **the love that makes up the fraternal life is an important aspect of the message of the apostle Paul**, a faithful disciple of the Divine Master. He announces the Gospel with all the available means of his time because, first of all, he experiences grace, the fruit of God's love poured out on him. Because of this, he can say: *"This life that I live in the body, I live in the faith of the Son of God who loved me and delivered himself up for me"* (Gal 2,20). At the same time, he is aware that this love is not intimist, *"is not envious, is not boastful, is not puffed up with pride, is not disrespectful, is not self-seeking, does not lose its temper, does not make a record of injuries received, does not delight in injustice but is happy with the truth. It excuses everything, believes everything, hopes everything, bears everything"* (1Cor 13,4-7).

For us religious it is a great challenge; it is a prophetic sign to give witness to love starting from community life, which must differentiate itself from mercantilistic reasoning and individualism. As we know, it is not enough to live together under the same roof; even in a hotel people live like that. It is not enough to stay together doing a good work, even if in the field of communication. So many NGO's do admirable things, but not because of this they are known as religious communities. Living in community demands from us **the witness of love, shown in concrete human rapports of respect, forgiveness, acceptance, mercy and fraternal service.**

Only if human rapports are marked by love shall we be **credible witnesses** of Jesus. Pope Francis helps us to reflect on this aspect when he writes: *"... I have felt bad finding how in some Christian communities and even among consecrated persons space is given to various forms of hate, division, calumny, defamation, vengeance, jealousy, desire to impose one's ideas at whatever cost, to the point of persecutions that appear to be an implacable hunting of witches. Who do we want to evangelize with this behavior?"*<sup>6</sup>

In fact, *"if in our hearts there is not the warmth of God, of his love, of his tenderness, how can we, poor sinners, warm the heart of others?"*<sup>7</sup> Hence, brothers, let us make efforts following the steps of the apostle Paul and of our Founder, to *"love everybody, think about everybody, operate with the spirit of the Gospel which is universality and mercy."*<sup>8</sup>

Blessed James Alberione wrote in his diary as a youth that *"a life without love is a life that is arid, sad, cynical, skeptical, angry."*<sup>9</sup> We should, therefore, ask ourselves about the intensity of love in ourselves and among us. The Holy Year of Mercy, announced

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<sup>5</sup> Saint Augustine, *Trattati su Giovanni*, 84, 1-2; CCL 36, 536-538.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, n. 100.

<sup>7</sup> Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rallegratevi*, cit., n. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Giacomo Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei [UPS]*, edited by the Center of Pauline Spirituality, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan), 1998, IV, 118.

<sup>9</sup> Giacomo Alberione, *Sono creato per amare Dio*, Rome, Casa Generalizia, Pia Società San Paolo, 1980, n. 4.

by the Holy Father,<sup>10</sup> will be an opportune time not only to announce the message of the mercy of God to others, but also to live it among ourselves.

Love makes us love as brothers and creates a climate of family in the communities. What our Special General Chapter already said is very relevant: *“Only when a community succeeds in living in a climate of family, in which each one is in solidarity with the others, each one is available to bear the burdens of the others (cf Gal 6,2), each one rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep (cf Rom 12,15), only then can we overcome the void of isolation, tiredness, anxieties, defeats, wounds and all the forces destructive of our spiritual integrity.”*<sup>11</sup> May the Lord help us to truly love!

### **Evangelizing “in communion” through and in communication**

**The Gospel is the announcement of love which generates communion.** When we talk of love and communion, coming to our mind is the **image of the “Triune God.”** That is, one God in three Persons, united in love and who live in continuous communion: the Father who is creator, the Son who is redeemer and the Holy Spirit who is sanctifier. They are three subjects that are in dialog with each other, love each other and relate with each other in perfect communication.

This is an important point, as far as our charism is concerned. True love generates communion and, as a result, leads to opening of communication. In fact, the first meaning of communication, appearing in the XII century (1160), comes from Latin and points to the idea of communion, to the idea of *sharing*. Only in the XVI century it starts to acquire also the sense of *transmission, diffusion*, connected to the development of techniques, starting from the press.<sup>12</sup> Hence, communication, first of all, is always the search for the other and an effort to share which lets communion grow.

It is certain that for us Paulines diffusion is very important, insofar as it concerns our mission to disseminate the Word of God using all the languages of communication. We must do this, and do it well! However, our charism equally requires a personal commitment on our part to be persons of communication, as already the VI General Chapter advised us, communication which includes communication with the Triune God, with ourselves and with others.

**Jesus is the primary model and the first measuring meter of our communication.** About this truth not many words are necessary. It is enough to see in the Gospels how was his rapport with the Father, with himself and with others. In his rapport with persons *“he showed respect for his listeners, sympathy for their situations and needs, compassion for their sufferings and a resolute determination to tell them what they needed to*

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<sup>10</sup> The Year of Mercy will start in the next Feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 December 2015) and will end on 20 November 2016, Sunday of Our Lord Jesus Christ King of the Universe.

<sup>11</sup> *Chapter Documents*, Special General Chapter 1969-1971, Rome, Casa Generalizia della Società San Paolo, 1971, n. 276.

<sup>12</sup> Dominique Wolton, *Pensar la comunicaci3n*. Buenos Aires, Prometeo Libros, 2007, p. 37.

hear, so as to capture their attention and help them to receive his message, without coercion and compromises, deceits and manipulations.”<sup>13</sup>

The **Apostle Paul** is a disciple of Jesus even as a man of communication, in the true sense of “**promoter of communion.**” There are many passages in his letters where he insists on communion as an important requisite of the Christian community. Using the image of the body, he makes us see that communion does not mean uniformity. In fact, he writes: “*There are various charisms, but only one is the Spirit; there are various ministries, but only one is the Lord; there are various activities, but only one is God who does everything in everybody*” (1Cor 12,4-6).

We Paulines, evangelizers-communicators, are called to make of the community a place of communion and to live unity in the diversity of gifts, in spite of our limitations. Because of this, as our Founder reminds us, we need to exercise much abnegation. In fact, “*the diversity of temperaments, of age, of habits, of ideas, of experiences, of occupations and tendencies, etc., is always a cause of reciprocal sufferings. It is therefore necessary to know how to be tolerant, how to give up our viewpoints, recognize our errors, show some courtesy, etc.: everything requires a total abnegation.*”<sup>14</sup>

We know that in communities where fraternal rapports do not exist, where dialog is missing, the apostolate does not go ahead and sadly, it stops. **Communion among ourselves is basic for the success of our mission and for credibility** both in front of our lay collaborators and in front of our recipients. Therefore, «*be understanding towards one another and love one another: “The same love for Christ has gathered us”; give mutual help of prayer and collaboration. Personal egoisms destroy community life; social, political, family egoisms straightaway destroy institutes, or at least condemn them to sterility*»<sup>15</sup>.

One of the action lines of the X Chapter, with regard to community life, says: “*Build up our communities according to the spirit of saint Paul in the witness of a life given to God, in fraternal communion and in apostolic synergy*” (2.1). Thanks to the effort of everybody, we can build up communities of this kind to ever make better the quality of our life and to lead to completion our mission.

## **Evangelizing “with courage” using communication and in communication**

In love, which generates communion, we are called to **enter into the dynamics of a “going out church”** insisted upon by Pope Francis. Even our X General Chapter has declared: «*We are the Church and we want to be, with the Church, a “going out” Congregation, “on the go” so as to put ourselves near the “new Macedonians” (cf 16,9) who ask for us: the crowds now without a pastor, the forgotten minorities, the marginalized, all kinds of*

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<sup>13</sup> Pontifical Council of Social Communications, *Etica nelle Comunicazioni Sociali*. Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000, n. 32.

<sup>14</sup> UPS, cit., IV, 221.

<sup>15</sup> UPS, cit., I, 382.

sick people, the socially downtrodden, the youth nobody hears or victims of modern addictions, the unemployed and the migrants, the hungry for bread and truth, those who have excluded God from their existence, those who have lost the meaning of life ...» (Final Document, Introduction, 4).

**Only by “going out” of self-obsession**, or from our personal world, from the reality of a community closed in itself and **from a Congregation that looks only at its own problems or its own successes**, shall we be able to advance. Only by looking at the world which changes and taking up the new languages of communication **we shall be able to update our apostolate** to reach our recipients of this century. As our Founder already said: «*The times walk ahead, and it is useless to say: “Once this did not exist, we did not do this way ...”. The souls of “once” are already either in Paradise or in hell; we must save the souls of today. All the saints have acted in this way*»<sup>16</sup>.

Hence there is need for courage. Courage means “to be brave,” that is, “not to fear doing new things.” Therefore, we must **have the courage to change the initiatives and the structures that do not respond anymore to the needs of our time and look for new forms to realize our charism**. Perhaps **we can talk of apostolic “parresia.”** “*Parresia is the freedom and the courage of a need open to the action of the word of God and that in it puts itself at the disposition of God and of neighbor.*”<sup>17</sup> It is to preach undaunted, to speak with courage and without fear. Jesus calls us to be apostles, **audacious not only with our means, but also in our contents**. The world needs apostles who are full of “parresia,” who announce the Lord Jesus with all the power that He radiates.

Without courage, accompanied by its sister “creativity,” we run the risk in evangelization of doing the same things that we have always done and arriving at the same persons to whom we have always arrived. Obviously, it is not fitting to abandon those who traditionally are the recipients of our apostolate. It is necessary, however, to do ever more and to always search for the farthest, especially those in the periphery.

Bravery, however, does not mean doing grandiose and expensive things. In this attention and prudence are needed so as not to make “steps that are longer than our legs.” There are many small initiatives that can be adopted in the field of the press, of radio, of television (in certain particular cases even with neutral means), in the digital world, in formation, in the biblical field and in that of communications, etc.

Finally, we cannot forget the organizational aspect, especially when it is a matter of elaborating projects and of working in *équipe*, because talking of a “going out congregation” does not mean that each one should go anywhere he wants. We are a “religious congregation,” so the apostolic initiatives have meaning when they form part of an organic project in which the persons are involved with their own tasks and responsibilities, without blocking its creativity.

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<sup>16</sup> *Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1946-1949*, cit., p. 576.

<sup>17</sup> *Chapter Documents*, cit., n. 263.

Even on this front we can say that “audacity” is necessary to change the methodology of work. Our Founder said: “*Let the apostolate be unified, for the whole Congregation. A single Center: everything there, firmly, without allowing yourselves to be guided by small interests or by particular views: all this must disappear in the common universal good. There is a universal good to be attained, which is to be placed ahead of any private good: this is an obligation, not an advice; and a religious obligation.*”<sup>18</sup>

### **In conversion, on the road to Emmaus.**

**Love, communion and courage** are three aspects of our Pauline life that, in order to be put into practice, **need conversion**, or changing the attitudes that go against them. It is exactly this which the *General Objective 2015-2021* of the Final Document of the X General Chapter affirms: “*Attentive to the signs of the times, to renew the thrust of our apostolic mission by converting ourselves, our communities and our apostolic structures so as to arrive to all, especially to the peripheries, making use also of the new languages of communication.*”

Speaking of conversion, it seems opportune to me to call to mind at least the principal points of the **discourse of the Pope to the Roman Curia** on the occasion of the presentation of the Christmas wishes of last year. Francis enumerates a series of sicknesses that must be healed so that the Curia may be a credible witness today in the world. No doubt his discourse is addressed to all the persons who work in the various organisms of the Church; in truth such sicknesses and temptations are a danger for everyone, even for us who try to respond to the call of God in the Pauline consecrated life.

In the wake of that discourse, we ask the Lord to free each one of us «*from feeling ourselves “immortal,” “immune” or straightaway “indispensable”; from excessive laboriousness; from mental and spiritual “petrification”; from excessive planning and functionalism; from bad coordination; from “spiritual Alzheimer’s ”; from rivalries and vainglory; from existential schizophrenia; from chatter, from murmurings and gossips; from deifying bosses; from indifference toward others; from sullen faces; from hoarding; from closed circles and worldly profit; from exhibitionism.*”<sup>19</sup>

Finally, in light of Easter time, I invite you to call to mind the two disciples who, disconsolate, were journeying toward Emmaus. The two were conversing about what had happened in Jerusalem and were pouring out on each other their sadness; the darkness in their hearts and their regret did not allow them to notice Jesus in that traveler who walked beside them. They were so blinded by their sorrow and by ill humor that they did not recognize Jesus, even when “he explained to them from all

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<sup>18</sup> Giacomo Alberione, *Alle Figlie di San Paolo, 1940-1945*, Rome, FSP-Casa Generalizia, 2000, p. 325.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, *Discourse to the Roman Curia* on the occasion of the presentation of the Christmas wishes, 22 December 2014.

the scriptures what referred to him" (Lk 24,27), although "their hearts were burning within them" (Lk 24,32). Only when Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke and shared it, were the eyes of the disciples opened and they recognized him.

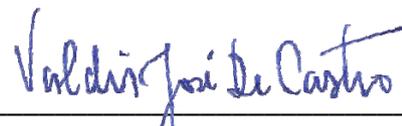
Very beloved brothers, let us receive the presence of the Risen Jesus. He is alive also in our midst, especially in his Word and in the Eucharist. Starting from this Easter experience, we can make a journey together, uniting our forces to push ahead our mission on the "four wheels of the Pauline cart" (sanctity, study, apostolate, poverty). As the disciples of Emmaus have done after having recognized Jesus at the breaking of the bread, **let us banish from us negative thoughts and let us allow that the light of the Risen One illumine** dark situations which, at times, try to obfuscate the journey. **Let us proceed forward with courage, with love, with audacity and in communion**, continuing on the path which Fr. Alberione has opened for us and for the whole Pauline Family, "always with our eyes looking at vast horizons."<sup>20</sup>

May Mary Queen of the Apostles and Saint Paul the Apostle be our intercessors in the challenge to live and announce Jesus Master, the Way, the Truth and the Life, in creative fidelity to the charism inherited from our Founder.

A holy and happy Easter to all!

Fraternally.

Rome, Holy Saturday, 4 April 2015  
*131 yrs. from Bl. James Alberione's birth*



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Fr. Valdir José De Castro, SSP  
Superior General

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<sup>20</sup> Papa Francesco, *Discorso alla Famiglia Paolina*, 27 novembre 2014.