



INTRODUCTION TO THE SEMINAR ON APOSTOLIC MYSTICISM

Sr Anna Maria Parenzan, General Superior FSP

With great joy I want to warmly welcome all of you to the St. Paul House, where we will be living together an experience of communion, immersion in the overflowing wealth of the Pauline vocation, discernment and a sharing of what the Spirit will suggest and inspire so as to enable us to respond always more appropriately to the gift we have received.

Thank you all for having accepted the invitation to participate in this Seminar. I also want to thank the sisters and brother of the Preparatory Commission,¹ those who are carrying out translation and secretarial services, as well as the sisters who are taking care of the practical needs of this community.

We represent the whole world and in these days the St. Paul House will become the heart of the Congregation. We feel close to all the sisters who are praying and offering themselves for us, especially our sick and elderly sisters, whose lives have already attained the unity toward which we are striving.

Together, we will be living very demanding days, rich in enlightenment, sharing, discernment and prayer.

We truly can consider our gathering to be a “big event”—a long-awaited moment in which we have placed a lot of hope.

WHY A SEMINAR ON APOSTOLIC MYSTICISM?

In these years, Pope Francis, experts on the consecrated life, our Chapter assemblies and our congregational meetings have all continually declared that the future of the religious life—and thus of the Pauline life—lies in the power of its mystical and prophetic dimensions, that is to say, in its welcome and development of the life of Jesus infused in us in Baptism, and in our explicit witness to a more evangelical way of living and acting—a way that grasps the signs of God the Father’s actions in history.

“To believe and communicate”: this is an inseparable binomial for us; it is our most genuine identity. In fact, we are called to be persons who manifest and irradiate the Divine Master dwelling within us; persons who allow ourselves to be “pierced” by the Word so as to become its apostles and communicate the “fire of Love” that encompasses our existence.

At a round-table session held during the celebration of our Centenary, Professor Andrea Riccardi, a historian and the founder of the St. Egidio Community, said: «This is what I see in the Pauline charism: a profound connection between a heart that listens to the Word of God and a passionate, missionary heart that communicates that Word».

Anticipating by a number of decades the directives of the Church today, Fr. Alberione urged the Daughters of St. Paul toward a life unified in love:

¹ The Preparatory Commission is made up of Fr. Giuseppe Forlai, igs; Sr. Anna Caiazza; Sr. Samuela Gironi; Sr. Annunciata Bestetti; Sr. Josefa Soares dos Santos; Sr. Felicita Teron.

The apostolate...is the fruit of an intense interior life. It presupposes a heart aflame—a heart that cannot contain or restrain that interior fire...²

When one's heart is aflame, one finds many initiatives and projects [to carry out]. True love is manifested in the day-to-day fatigues of the apostolate, which prompt one to think, organize and race ahead³.

This *fire in one's heart* is the unifying force, the foundation of the “teaching dimension” of the apostolate to which Fr. Alberione urged us on from the very beginning. He was truly tireless in encouraging and inciting us toward always more vast and profound horizons because «we owe a debt to everyone due to the very nature of our vocation and also due to the example of St. Paul and the heart of Jesus Christ, the Divine Master»⁴.

And Pope Francis encourages us, saying:

Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the Good News not only with words but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence.... Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work... Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the Word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, it can easily happen that our work becomes meaningless, we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer (EG 259, 262).

We feel a great responsibility to make the immense treasure we have received shine brightly, to make it attractive to the young generations, enabling them to perceive the beauty of being, through our very lives, a “living memory of the Gospel,” of being “persons/vessels” called to satisfy the thirst of contemporary humanity by communicating the abundant graces we have received. This communication should touch hearts, spread the warmth of Mother Church, build bridges, foster fruitful human encounters, open spaces for dialogue, mutual understanding, reconciliation, and build peace and harmony⁵.

Communication is a basic element of our charism and should be considered first of all from its *mystical aspect*. In fact, “it is not technology that determines whether or not communication is authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to wisely use the means at our disposal”⁶.

The basic theme is *my heart*...the music, the beauty, the communion that I hold within it. This is the same thing Msgr. M. Celli said at the aforementioned round-table session.

All this is possible if, in docility to the Spirit, we experience a more concrete unity of life in Christ, rising above the conflicts and dichotomies that at times we see in our daily lives. We want to become always more aware (and concretely express in our daily lives) that we are not persons consecrated in view of what we do but in view of *how we do it* and *for whom* we do it.

The style of life we have adopted in different parts of the world often gives privilege to “work for work's sake” at the expense of harmony of life and genuine openness to others; at the expense of encounters that favor true communication. We realize that the problem is not our activity but *activism*, which at times causes us to lose the profound motivations of our vocation.

Maestra Thecla was convinced that “the Congregation does not need people who know how to do a lot of things, who make a lot of noise.... It needs holy people” (VPC 263).

And Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI reminds us:

The first word, the genuine initiative, the true activity, comes from God. It is only by inserting ourselves in this divine initiative, it is only by pleading for this divine initiative, that we too can become evangelizers with him and in him⁷.

² Talk given by Fr. Alberione at a Congress for Men Religious, 16 December 1950.

³ FSP46-49, p. 580.

⁴ Editorial in the first issue of *Way, Truth and Life Magazine*.

⁵ Cf. Message for the 50th World Day of Communications.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Meditation for the first general gathering of the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, Rome, 8 October 2012.

In classical spirituality, the mystical life was manifested through mystical phenomena. In the Pauline life, the mystical life is revealed through the apostolate, through communication. In fact, in carrying out our mission, we do not simply perform an activity. Instead, we reveal a living Person; we carry out a liturgical act, as St. Paul underscored in his letter to the Romans. Our apostolic activity is a “sacred action”⁸, a marvelous “liturgy,” that is to say: a continual act of self-donation aimed at “consecrating” all humanity to God in Christ.

FR. ALBERIONE AND APOSTOLIC MYSTICISM

Fr. Alberione never used the term “apostolic mysticism” but he often spoke about mysticism as the incarnation of God in us. Speaking to the young candidates at the beginning of the Congregation, he said:

When we speak about mysticism, we are not only speaking about extraordinary revelations but about how to live in communion with God so as to be apostles. You are all called to the mystical life...⁹

In Fr. Alberione’s preaching, the apostolate should be understood as a spiritual thrust that involves one’s whole life: the life of Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel are inseparable attitudes because we are called to “give what we have received: to give what we are!”¹⁰. We are called to grasp that “Jesus speaks, feels and communicates in us.... He is at work and wants us to become his voice by repeating his words”¹¹.

When the Founder sought to infuse the sisters with fervor for the Pauline mission, his words reached mystical heights. He said to the propagandists:

Take Jesus and feel him. From time to time, lift your hand to your breast where he dwells in the tabernacle that is you yourself.... God is with you. Jesus is with you spiritually. Set out with Jesus, like Mary...¹²

And speaking to the sisters who carried out the writing apostolate, he said:

“Go to chapel, go to make the Visit. Ask the Lord what he wants you to say, then write it down. Draw from the Mass, from communion, from the Tabernacle...then write. Above all, draw from God. Feel the Lord! ...May each of you be like a flame. Otherwise, you will find your work difficult, your heart empty. It will seem like your pen does not want to write”¹³.

Fr. Alberione himself had an intimate relationship with the Master, who unleashed in him a powerful dynamism manifested in numerous and complex apostolic initiatives.

Like the Apostle Paul, he was *moved, conquered and seized by the Spirit*. The profound attraction to the Eucharist he experienced on the “night of light” (31 December 1900), allowed him to accomplish marvelous things; it was his key for interpreting every event and his impetus for making the most of every new path for evangelization.

We could say that Fr. Alberione was “captured” by the will of God—a will that little by little became clearer to him (cf. AD 21). He was an apostle *moved by the Spirit*—a simple and docile pen in the hand of an artist (cf. AD 350).

The Spirit has called us to participate in the same grace he transfused into the Founder. We are “those persons” who “would feel what he felt.”

⁸ FSP58, p.47.

⁹ A. Bassi, *La missione delle Figlie di San Paolo*, FSP Generalate, Rome 2006, p. 60.

¹⁰ FSP58, p. 47.

¹¹ FSP55, p. 271.

¹² FSP58, p. 373.

¹³ FSP54, p. 182ff.

We too were moved by the Spirit and conquered by the invitation of Jesus: "Come to me, all of you." We too feel deeply obliged to do something for the Lord and for the people of today (cf. Const. 1).

This article of the Constitutions contains the secret of our being *contemplative in action and active in contemplation*, or better, it contains the secret of our being *apostolically mystical and mystical apostles*.... This is not a play on words; it is an attempt to express, through the poverty of language, the profound integrality to which we are all called.

REVIEWING OUR HISTORY...

This Seminar calls us to refocus on our identity, offering guidelines and proposals for the future, and also drawing on a rich tradition in which we can perceive, perhaps with awe, a sense of continuity and progress.

Let us take a rapid look at the orientations the Congregation received from our last four General Chapters, spanning more than 20 years of our history, so as to grasp the journey we have made with the grace of God.

1995: 7th General Chapter

Our 7th General Chapter vigorously reposed the centrality of Christ the Master and urged us to enter more decisively into the world of communications, which is for us a manifestation of God and a sign of the times. The six-year mandate that began in 1995 was characterized by the motto: *To live and communicate Christ the Master in the areopagus of communications.*

The Final Document reaffirmed:

We believe it was the Spirit who inspired us to adopt a Christological orientation as the fulcrum of our general objective for the upcoming six-year period.... We feel the need to return to a literal interpretation of the words our Founder offered us as a program of life: "At the center: Jesus Master."

This intuition gave rise to the [general] objective:

With the ardor of Paul and the prophetic vision of Fr. Alberione, the Daughter of St. Paul lives and communicates Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life, center of our life and mission....

In its Working Objectives, the Final Document urged us to:

improve the quality of our consecrated life as persons and communities, living our Pauline discipleship in an attitude of continual conversion, so as to attain that "unity of life" in Christ in which consecration, formation, fraternal communion and mission are integrated for the apostle.

2001: 8th General Chapter

The Chapter Document offers this explanation of the theme:

From Eucharist to Mission; Together We Communicate the Gospel Today. This theme responds to an urgent need of our Congregation, which, at this point of its history, has rediscovered Jesus Christ as its unifying center, its "fire," the Love that prompts us to a new apostolic thrust (cf. 2 Co. 5:14)¹⁴.

This theme contains the heart of our identity as Paulines. In fact, moved by the Spirit, Fr. Alberione anchored his foundational project in the Eucharist, the illuminating presence of the Master, who draws everyone to himself: "Come to me, all of you" (Mt. 11:28; AD 15), and sends us forth as

¹⁴ CD 2001, 5.

a community: “I am your light and I will use you in order to enlighten; I am giving you this mission and I want you to carry it out” (AD 157)¹⁵.

It was once again hammered home that the communications culture offers a twofold challenge to our mission:

To get to know that culture so as to integrate the Gospel message into it (cf. Rm 37c), and to live a more profound and intimate relationship with the Eucharistic Master, who progressively conforms us to himself (cf. Ga. 2:20) and transforms us into his communicators. “Who will carry out the apostolate better? Eucharistic souls. Jesus in the Eucharist is the Master who teaches; he is the Truth and Eucharistic souls will possess a greater love for the truth and greater zeal in the apostolate” (FSP41, p. 137)¹⁶.

Let us remember that the “dream” of the Daughters of St. Paul at the beginning of this Millennium moved in a single direction, namely: “toward a Congregation that is more Pauline and, consequently, more contemplative, more missionary and universal, more fraternal, wiser and better prepared”¹⁷.

2007: 9th General Chapter

Our 9th General Chapter remained in continuity with the directives of the two preceding Chapters.

In harmony with the theme: *Chosen and loved in Christ Jesus, we communicate his Word to everyone,*” it vigorously underscored the need for faith lived as a relationship and gave more emphasis to this principle, which is the foundation of our identity as consecrated Paulines:

Communication is the style of life that manifests our faith in Christ Jesus, whom we are called to announce with courage and creativity in the culture of communication, so that the Word of Life will touch and transform all persons, and love will “truly become the dominant measure of the world”¹⁸.

And article 24 of the Chapter Document underscores the need to pay attention not only to works but to a life of faith based on our Pauline “cart”:

This is the cart on which we bring the Gospel to souls and on which we must remain so as to give it to them (FSP54, p. 144)¹⁹.

Even at this point, the *Planning* that sprang from the 9th General Chapter included the programming of an *International Seminar on Pauline Mysticism* (which was not held), as a response to the line of action: “To promote a deeper study of the mystical dimension of the apostolate, as lived by Paul and interpreted by our Founder.”

2013: 10th General Chapter

Looking at our situation and at possible scenarios for the future, the Chapter Assembly pinpointed the theme: *We believe and so we speak* as the objective to realize in the new journey that was beginning. In fact:

When faith is lived as an intimate and profound relationship with the Lord, it gives rise to a passion to proclaim him because we can communicate only “what we have heard, what we have seen

¹⁵ CD 2001, 6.

¹⁶ CD 2001, 8.

¹⁷ CD 2001, 23.

¹⁸ CD 2007, 9.

¹⁹ CD 2007, 24.

with our own eyes, what we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life” (1 Jn. 1:1)²⁰.

Our “speaking” should spring from our joy in believing and from our awareness of being called to witness to and proclaim the Kingdom of God in the culture of communications, in a special way today through a decisive commitment in the digital world²¹.

This objective gave rise to two guidelines for action: *to revive the gift of faith* and *to follow the paths of the new evangelization so as to offer everyone “the charity of the truth.”*

Some of the consequent working objectives were:

- *to live faith* in an ecclesial horizon and relational dimension;
- *to come to a deeper grasp of apostolic mysticism* as the call to allow ourselves to be conformed to Christ in our life and mission;
- *to found our style of life* on the spirit of the Pact, in harmony with the “four wheels”;
- *to rediscover the teaching nature* proper to our Institute so as to focus on our specific Pauline identity....

OBJECTIVES OF THIS SEMINAR

Taking as a starting point our rich congregational and ecclesial reflections, the general objective of this Seminar is: “to rediscover in our apostolic mysticism the unifying power of our spirituality and the prophetic power of our mission.” In other words, its purpose is to pinpoint, in Christ the Master, Way, Truth and Life, the “unifying center,” the secret of our unity of life and of our identity, namely: “to live Christ as St. Paul understood, lived and communicated him” (Const. 7).

Devotion to Jesus Master, the center of our spirituality, “is not something devotional or intellectual. Instead, it involves our whole life, gives direction to the apostolate, and becomes our spiritual project for the complete development of our life of faith. It is the center that unifies our life, vocation and mission. It is truly the center of the Pauline project”²².

As *specific objectives* of the Seminar, we want to call to the fore some practical orientations that will enable us to become an always more Pauline Congregation—one that lives the Pauline method of integrality and thus moves ahead on the “four wheels” (considering prayer and study as the wheels that guide the cart, in keeping with the thought of the Founder).

We often ask ourselves why certain things, even though stated and restated constantly, make very little impact on our life. Perhaps what is lacking is a method that favors assimilation and integration. Perhaps we do not insist enough on creating beforehand the favorable conditions that will enable our “soil” to *preserve, assimilate and make our own* the content [we receive] so as to transform it into life. We do not always remember that the “Pauline method” involves the whole person: intelligence, body, feelings, creativity.

In our reflections in the coming days, let us also pay attention to practical modes, to the structural conditions of our communities that allow us to be “good soil” that welcomes the continual shower of seeds that fall on us every day.

We cannot deceive ourselves: the unification for which we yearn will never be fully realized. Nevertheless, it should be patiently sought, taking as our point of departure a dynamic center, a point of attraction on which everything—prayer, study, apostolate, poverty—converges.

This center is a Person who draws us toward his horizons. We are called to incarnate Jesus to the point that his life can be seen in the evangelization activities we carry out (cf. DF 36). We are called to place all our energies at the disposition of the Master so that he himself can accomplish his apostolic work in us. Definitively speaking, we are called to live our Baptism, to surrender our-

²⁰ CD 2013, 9.

²¹ CD 2013, 10.

²² Cf. A. Martini, *Gesù Maestro: una spiritualità per la missione*.

selves to Christ so that he alone will “live, think, work, love, will, pray, suffer, die and rise” in us (cf. DF 64).

TOGETHER, LIKE “ANTENNAS” OF THE SPIRIT

We are all co-responsible for the Congregation’s future journey and for its witness in the Church and world. The Holy Spirit works in the “body” and each sister possesses her own experiences for discerning the new paths he is opening. Let us remember the words of Pope Francis:

A synodal Church is a Church that listens, keeping in mind that listening is more than hearing. It is a mutual listening in which each party has something to learn from the other²³.

The Pope also reminds us that we are called to rediscover our responsibility as a community to be a prophet witness, to search together with humility and patience.... We must be like antennas, ready to perceive the seeds of the new things the Spirit is constantly raising up, including in our times.

Ahead of us lie days of reflection, prayer and discernment during which we will listen to the will of the Lord and set down practical guidelines to be entrusted to the superiors when they come to Rome in September to participate in our Interchapter Meeting.

WITH MARY, THE LIVING TABERNACLE OF CHRIST

We will be accompanied on our journey by Mary, the Virgin of the Visitation—the one whom the Founder pointed out to us as “the living Tabernacle” of Christ because she carried Jesus within herself and communicated him to everyone. Mary is the ark of the New Covenant, the first Apostle of the Gospel, the Mother of the evangelizing Church because she is the Mother of the Living Gospel, “the disciple who welcomes, treasures and lives the Word” (Const. 10). Touched by the Spirit like Mary, we too can become apostles, communicators of the beauty of God, bearers of joy.

May Mary ask for and obtain for us an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in order that he might enlighten, guide and move the Congregation in the direction desired by God the Father. May the Spirit open us to mutual listening so that the splendor of the [Pauline] vocation will continue to amaze and captivate us.

Let us live this experience in the spirit of a joyous meeting, of grace and of a hope that is based not our own “horses and chariots”—that is to say, not on our own strength and numbers—but on the One in whom we have placed our trust.

This Seminar is without a doubt a worthy crown to our Centenary Year and an ulterior invitation to allow ourselves to be pervaded by the joy of the Gospel so that our existence and each of our communities may be “doors” thrown wide “to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ.”

²³ Pope Francis, 17 October 2015.