



THE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR ALBERIONE'S CONCEPT OF INTEGRALITY¹

Giuseppe Forlai, igs²

Knowledge of the three models of the priesthood and an understanding of why Alberione chose one specific model out of the three can help us understand the journey he made in developing his model of integrality.

Alberione was familiar with the three models of the theology of the priesthood: the *missionary model*, with its link to the role of prophecy; the *sacramental model*, which gives fundamental importance to ministry of the sacraments, and the *pastoral model*, which gives priority to “taking care of souls.” All three models date back to ancient times.

St. Dominic, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Ignatius connect the *missionary model* of the priesthood to the prophetic role.

The *pastoral model of the priesthood* dates back to St. Augustine. The model of the priest as pastor/shepherd, which to us would seem to be the most widespread and most spontaneous of the three models, is in reality the most uncertain one, historically speaking. After St. Augustine, this model vanished, only to re-emerge at the time of St. Gregory the Great (540 A.D.). Around 1000 A.D. the parallelism between priest and pastor/shepherd disappeared once again. It was resurrected in the 1800's by theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. The pastoral model of the priest as one who goes from home to home, taking care of souls, was advocated, and pastoral formation according to the French St. Sulpice method began to spread. This method, which Alberione learned in the Seminary of Alba, was incarnated by priests who were renowned pastors/shepherds (e.g., St. Sulpice, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis de Sales, St. John Mary Vianney, etc.).

The *sacramental model of the priesthood* is tightly connected to the administration/celebration of the sacraments. This model was already present in the *Didaché* and continued intact from the time of St. John Chrysostom. It was definitively codified by the Council of Trent, which established that the only activity of priests was to celebrate Mass because catechesis and preaching were reserved exclusively to bishops. In fact, at this point in time priests no longer taught catechism but then neither did the bishops. As a result, preaching and catechizing were entrusted to Clerics Regular such as the Barnabites and Jesuits. The model of a priesthood focused on the sacraments was accepted by Vatican Council II (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, nn. 13-14), together with the pastoral and missionary models.

¹ These notes derive from a conversation with Fr. Giuseppe Forlai and were reviewed and approved by him.

² **Giuseppe Forlai** (1972) è presbitero della Diocesi di Roma e membro dell'Istituto Gesù Sacerdote. Ha conseguito il dottorato in teologia con specializzazione in mariologia presso la Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Marianum e, in seguito, ha studiato filosofia politica ed etica presso l'Università di Tor Vergata (Roma). Dal 1999 al 2003 è stato cappellano negli istituti penitenziari di Roma. Già docente incaricato presso l'Istituto di spiritualità della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, è stato, tra l'altro, addetto all'Ufficio Pastorale Scolastica della Diocesi di Roma. Attualmente svolge il ministero dell'accompagnamento spirituale nel Pontificio Seminario Romano Maggiore e di animatore in diversi istituti e organismi della vita consacrata. Giuseppe Forlai che, come ama dire, «impiega il suo tempo migliore soprattutto nel cercare di essere un cristiano mite e pensante», esercita un fecondo “apostolato della penna”. È autore infatti di numerosi testi, alcuni scritti per la San Paolo e per le Paoline, con le quali ha pubblicato *Cristo vive in me. La proposta spirituale di Don Alberione* (2013) e *Io sono «Vangelo». Decidersi per Cristo alla scuola di Paolo* (2015).

Each of the three types of priesthood synthesizes contemplation and action in its own particular way. Fr. Alberione gradually moved from the pastoral priesthood model, which he presents in his book *Notes on Pastoral Theology*, to a prophetic-missionary model of the priesthood, exercised through proclamation of the Word. He progressively developed toward the choice of a specific model of the priesthood upon which he then based his model of integrality.

It is helpful, therefore, to recognize the choice that Alberione consciously made and to see how, in developing his method of integrality, he took as his starting point the model of the priesthood in which he was initially formed—the model he was living at that time. It should also be kept in mind that there is not just one model of integrality in the Church; each spirituality has its own.

Alberione was formed in a pastoral spirituality modeled on St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis de Sales and the saints found in the church of the Alba Seminary. As a young priest, during his first years as an assistant pastor, Alberione changed his ideas concerning the priesthood because he came to understand that the pastoral model was not for him. Instead, he adopted the prophetic-missionary model that followed the style of Sts. Dominic, Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius. This change was the result of Alberione asking himself how he could be a priest of his times (the beginning of the 1900's). He found his answer in St. Thomas Aquinas and realized that he had to change the model of the priesthood he had learned in the Seminary of Alba. A consequence of this was that he felt obliged to give up his work in the Seminary.

Alberione also took his concept of the integration of the “four wheels” from St. Thomas Aquinas, which further confirms that he embraced the model of the priesthood presented by this saint. On what do we base these affirmations? On the fact that Alberione was very familiar with the spirituality of St. Thomas Aquinas since he guided a group of Third Order Dominicans in Alba, and also because his thesis for a Master's Degree is on the theology of St. Thomas. He was familiar with the saint's definition of the relationship between contemplation and action and was in accord with the explanation of it given by Royo Marin, a Dominican theologian, in the text *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (a text that Alberione had printed in Italy). With regard to this book, he told his followers: “Everything written in this text is good for us.”

The three ways of integrating one's life, grafted onto the three models of the priesthood (missionary, pastoral and sacramental), are all legitimate: one is not better than the other; instead each one functions according to a specific model of life. Formed in the French school of “priest-pastor/shepherd,” Alberione changed his model, opting for that of “priest-prophet,” “priest-announcer.” In his magisterium—particularly *Evangelii Gaudium*—Pope Francis says that what is needed today is a prophetic priesthood linked to the Word. The Pauline Family lives the prophetic priesthood. In fact, for Alberione, the priestly role is not exercised solely by the Society of St. Paul but by the whole Pauline Family. Therefore the model of integrality of the prophetic-missionary priesthood is for all the members of the PF, both men and women. This priestly role was already received as a gift in Baptism. The proclamation of Christ is the offering/sacrifice to which every baptized person is called. In fact, the highest form of worship is the proclamation of Christ (cf. Rm. 1:9).

Who or what gave Primo Maestro the instruments he needed to change his model of the priesthood? It seems to have been the fruit of his own personal, existential search. Consequently, Alberione chose to form the young members of his Family (or “House,” as he called it) to carry out the prophetic role of the priest, offering them a model of integrality different from the priest-pastor/shepherd model in which he had been formed in the Seminary of Alba (a model that followed the school of St. Sulpice). Nevertheless, Alberione never completely lost his initial formation: traces of it remained in him, in particular the method of prayer: Jesus in one's mind, heart and hands. He introduced these three elements into the Pauline Visit, grafting them onto his way of being a priest, namely, a person entirely dedicated to the Word, who proclaimed it beyond the borders of a specific territory (the pastoral model to which the seminaries of Alba were accustomed).

Alberione's shift toward a missionary model of the priesthood can also be noted in an excerpt from the *Pauline Cooperators' Bulletin* in which, speaking about the beginnings of the Foundation

(1914-1915), he writes that three books were read in the “House”: *the Gospel, the Letters of St. Paul* and *the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. St. Ignatius taught persons leaving for the missions the art of discernment because he was convinced that a person who know how to make the examination of conscience well can go to the ends of the earth without a companion. In accord with this thinking, Fr. Alberione formed his sons and daughters to give great importance to right intention because since they had to go unaccompanied to the “fringes” (by means of propaganda, the founding of houses abroad, etc.), it was necessary that they learn how to discern in a wise and upright way the different situations they would meet.

When Alberione abandoned the model of the pastoral priesthood, he adopted the missionary model, which was for religious exclusively. It would be interesting to discover if this was the reason his thoughts moved in the direction of a religious Family. Perhaps he thought he would not find collaborators among the diocesan priests, who were attached to their territory, but this is merely a hypothesis that would need to be proved through personal sources (for example, the Founder’s letters and writings). But Alberione returned to the model of the pastoral priesthood when he founded the Pastorelle Sisters.

It is very clear that he changed paradigms with respect to the text *Notes on Pastoral Theology* when he made his own the spirituality of *contemplata aliis tradere* (to communicate to others what one contemplates)—the spirituality of St. Dominic, St. Ignatius and the whole line of priests bound to the Word, with St. Paul as their model: “Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel” (1 Co. 1:17). At the end of his search, Alberione had come to understand the priestly ministry the way Paul understood it. The resulting picture is coherent and reconstructs the golden thread of a priesthood bound to the Word, shared by all the Institutes of the Pauline Family, which Alberione intuitively saw at a time when such a thing was absolutely not in fashion. In fact, his fellow-priests thought he was crazy. As I mentioned above, this is the kind of priesthood proposed by Pope Francis, who ends the last chapter of *Evangelli Gaudium*, entitled “Spirit-filled Evangelizers,” with the icon of Mary, who hastens to visit Elizabeth, prompting the ecclesial community look to her as a model of evangelization (cf. EG 288).

Our great model is the Dominican Family, which cultivated women preachers in its heart (for example, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Rose of Lima). As Third-Order Dominicans (with vows but not bound to the cloister), they had the possibility and opportunity to preach “alla penitenziale.”³ It is up to us to study more intensively our continuity with the Dominican Family. Alberione’s first idea concerning the Pauline Cooperators sprang from his work with the Third Order Dominicans, with whom he tried to initiate the apostolate of the press. He later abandoned this idea because he saw that they were too attached to their devotions and not very open to apostolic activity.

³ An exhortation that followed the homily, giving it a practical application.