



SAN PAOLO

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“My grace is enough for you”

Letter of the Superior general

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LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

“My grace is enough for you”

Dear brothers,

In order to pursue together the commitment we have assumed in the VIII General Chapter, **To be Saint Paul living today. A Congregation that strains forward**, I offer you as a tool for work my annual letter that with the title **“My grace is enough for you”** (2Cor 12:9), this year is dedicated to the second letter to the Corinthians.

I desire that common meditation on this letter of our Father Saint Paul be one of the numerous initiatives that as Paulines we undertake as contribution to the celebration of the **Pauline Year** that the Holy Father Benedict XVI has announced on 28 June 2007, during the celebration of the first Vespers of the solemnity of the holy apostles Peter and Paul in the papal Basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls. The Pope said: “I am happy to announce officially that we shall dedicate a special jubilee year to the apostle Paul, from **28 June 2008 to 29 June 2009**, on the occasion of the bimillennium of his birth, dated by historians as between 7 and 10 A.D.”.

Last June 30, during the feast of our common Patron, I addressed a letter to the Pope in which I expressed the deep gratitude of the whole Pauline Family and especially of the Society of St. Paul for this praiseworthy initiative. All of us Paulines in the world are convinced that this ecclesial event would have filled with joy even blessed James Alberione.

Previously, out of its own initiative, the General Government had already decided to organize an **International Seminar on Saint Paul** open to the whole Pauline Family; after the Pope’s announcement its date was fixed from **Sunday 19 to Wednesday 29 of April 2009**.

Even now I turn to each of you so that in our Congregation the celebration of the Pauline Year may turn out to be an **historical occasion** to know, meditate and imitate more Saint Paul and, at the same time, contribute to the awareness of the entire ecclesial community by means of spiritual initiatives, vocation promotion, continuing formation and all the Pauline multimedia activity that define our charism. I call everybody to a true **mobilization** at all levels, in full accord with the work and teaching of the Founder.

As already in the past years, also this year my annual letter takes from a particular **literary genre**: an initial contribution that the prayerful creativity of every Pauline, of all the communities and all the activities of the Congregation will know how to complete through original and pertinent contributions. My desire is to open a journey in the sense indicated by the VIII General Chapter, so as to apply to the meditation of the letters of Saint Paul a **special methodology**: reading them aided by various tools of **exegesis**, knowledge of the interpretation that the **Primo Maestro** has made of the same and, finally, the courage of a reading that starts from our **Pauline reality today**.

I invite you to share the results of your reflections, making use of the possibilities offered by the *forum* conceived on the model of the annual letter: it would be surprising if the apostles themselves of communication would not use collective communication!

THE SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication between Paul and the communities of Corinth was much more intense than what we can imagine at first sight. Three journeys and probably seven letters witness to the importance that these communities had for him and also to the worries that they caused him. All of that without taking into account the sending of Timothy and Titus as pacifiers of tensions and conflicts. What we know as the second letter to the Corinthians seems to be actually a collection of five distinct letters, each one with specific problems. This subdivision facilitates our understanding. We can attempt to reconstruct the facts in the following way.

In the year 50 Paul arrives in Corinth and finds some communities (Acts 18:1-18). This is the *first visit*. Some time after, he writes a warning letter (cf 1Cor 5:9: "I have written you in my previous letter not to mix with sexually immoral persons"). This letter got lost. Among scholars, some believe that it corresponds to the actual 2Cor 6:14-7:4, above all because of 6:14-18. In the year 54, at Ephesus, Paul writes again to the communities. It is the actual 1Cor, and Timothy must have been the bearer of the letter. The mood against Paul in Corinth began to be oppressive (cf 1Cor 4:17; see the threat of the rod in 4:20).

Around the year 55, Paul makes his *second visit* to the communities. This visit is not mentioned anywhere, but in 2Cor 12:14 and 13:1-2 Paul says that he is ready to go to Corinth the third time. During the second visit, a terrible conflict against Paul erupts. A person (perhaps the head of a group) rejects him harshly, accusing him of many things. Paul returns to Ephesus and in this same year he writes for the third time. It is the actual 2Cor 2:14-7:4.

In Corinth the situation becomes worse. Before the end of 55, Paul resumes to write. Titus goes to Corinth to pacify the communities and brings the letter written in the midst of many tears. It corresponds to the actual 2Cor 10-13. Titus succeeds in bringing peace to the communities and in the year 56 he goes to meet Paul in Macedonia. Happy because of the results achieved, Paul writes for the fifth time, full of consolation. It is the actual 2Cor 1:1-2:13 + 7:5-16.

For some time Paul is committed in the international collection of aids for the poor in Jerusalem. While probably he is still in Macedonia, in the year 56, he writes to the Corinthians asking for their cooperation. It is the actual 2Cor 8, letter delivered by Titus. He writes also to the other communities of Achaia. It is the actual 2Cor 9. From Macedonia, in the year 56, Paul goes ahead to Corinth. It is his *third visit*. He is committed in the international collection for the poor in Jerusalem and plans to go to Spain. He remains for three months in Corinth and (Acts 20:3) writes the letter to the Romans.

The reading of 2Cor in the order proposed may appear complicated, but in reality it is the easiest way to understand the sudden changes of tone and mood present in the letter. The fact that they are several letters made into one should not give rise to amazement. In truth, above everything else is Paul's passion for the Gospel and his love for the communities; and this the reason for which he spends himself without reserve, trusting in the Lord Jesus, "because it is in weakness that power manifests all its force" (12:9).

The conflict in Corinth is due perhaps to the manner of understanding and realizing evangelization. There are two models: that of Paul and the model of those who he criticizes, calling them merchants of the word of God (2:17). They present themselves with commendatory letters (3:1). Paul ironically calls them "eminent apostles" (11:5) and "ministers of Satan" (11:15), and unmasks them, revealing that they are profiteers of the faith of the Corinthians: "You actually support those who reduce you to slavery, who devour you, exploit you; one who is arrogant, who slaps you in the face" (11:20). They are five actions that make us understand that already during that period missionaries bereft of scruples betrayed evangelization.

For a synthetic vision of the Christian communities of Corinth, of the city itself and of its society, cf Letter of the Superior General 2007.

II. THE VARIOUS LETTERS AND THEIR MESSAGE

1. 2Cor 2:14–7:4: "You are our letter..."

2Cor 2:14–7:4 is the letter written probably after Paul had been to Corinth for the second time; there had been a dispute and Paul was

rejected. The rejection took place because the Corinthians were making comparisons between Paul and the other evangelizers who had passed by them armed with letters of presentation, forcing the communities to support them and to pay their preachings (see how Paul conducts himself in 1Cor 9). In this long text many themes arise. Among them the following stand out:

- Slandered and declared defeated – because he lives as a poor man among the poor – Paul shows that he is a victor in Christ. And he uses the image of a military parade (2:14-17): the victory of the Roman generals who bring with them their prisoners of war in order to execute them with the sword afterwards. In this parade incense was not absent - odor of life for the conquerors and odor of death for the defeated.
- In Corinth Christian evangelizers called by Paul "peddlers of the word of God" (2:17; cf 4:2) have passed by. According to them, Gospel meant privileges and luxuries at the expense of the communities, generally composed of poor people. They came with recommending letters and made of religion a source of profit (1Tm 6:6). The strength of Paul comes from the victorious Christ who gives victory to his missionaries. This accounts for the boldness with which he acts (3:12). Christ frees from fear and in this way the evangelizers can announce "with uncovered faces, reflecting the glory of the Lord" (3:18).
- The content of evangelization is the person of the conqueror, Jesus Christ. Paul says it using various names, employing the images of light and treasure. The greatness of the content is in contrast to the fragility of the missionaries, servants compared to vessels of clay. Even more, so that life may be manifest in the faithful, the evangelizers expose themselves and risk constantly of losing their life. And if this will happen, does it matter, since they follow him who has conquered death?
- The vocation of the Christian is to become light in Christ who is the light (3:18). In the measure in which one advances in life, greater light shines within the person, so that he does not walk toward ruin but toward glory. Paul does not enforce himself thanks to appearances (cf 10:10). His force comes from within, an energy that renews him constantly (3:12), even at the prospect of death. Make the comparison between 5:1-5 and Jn 14:1ff. The

human body, in its fragility, is compared to a tent that is undone. Compare 5:6,8 and Phil 1:21ff.

- As we have seen in 1Thes 2:1ff, in the face of evangelizers who impose themselves through the power of appearances, Paul appeals to God who scrutinizes persons from within, and he also appeals to the consciences of the Corinthians (5:11-12). Christ Jesus did not allow himself to be guided by appearances or privileges (cf Phil 2:6-11). Acting in this way, he showed to all that to be a Christian means to be a new creature, a bearer of novelty.
- Unlike the “superapostles”, Paul presents himself as a servant (cf Isa 49:8), similar to Jesus-servant (cf Phil 2:6-11; 1Cor 3:5; 4:1,9-13), offering an authentic picture of the pastoral worker. He faces the greatest adversities with the mindset of a winner (cf 2:14), moved by love that gives itself fully, as a father who spends his life for his children (12:14-15; in the opposite sense, 11:20).
- 6:14–7:4 puts in the forefront two realities that do not mix or are being confused with one another: on one side, justice, light, Christ, to believe, to be a temple of God; on the other, injustice, darkness, Belial, (demon, symbol of wickedness), to not believe, idols. This second reality reveals what the Corinthians were before they knew the Gospel; the first reality shows the novelty provoked by evangelization and by baptism (cf 1Cor 5-6). The fatherly and affectionate side of Paul, already shown in 6:11-13, appears again in 7:2ff: he is a father who loves, does no harm, does not destroy or exploit.

Suggestions for a Pauline reading. 1. Read with attention 2:17–7:4, emphasizing the characteristics of Paul as evangelizer and that paint a picture of the pastoral worker. 2. The temptation to transform religion into a source of profit is great (1Tim 6:6). Paul treats these persons harshly, calling them “peddlers of the Word”. What are the warnings of the Founder on this matter? Saying it positively, how not to make the apostolate a business, the evangelizer a merchant? Can we be pastoral even in the prices of our products? 3. “But even if our outer man deteriorates, the inner one renews itself day after day” (4:16). Does this suggest something related to permanent formation? Related to entering the third age?

2. 2Cor 10-13: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10)

This is the letter that Paul wrote “during a moment of great affliction and with anguish in his heart and in the midst of many tears” (2:4). It shows with energy the tension between true and false evangelization. It is also one of the clearest pictures of the Apostle.

- The letter begins (10:2,10) recalling two criticisms of the Corinthians against Paul, who does not impose himself with the help of appearances and prestige (cf 1Cor 2:1-5), as the “superapostles” do. Paul defends himself, emphasizing the pioneering character of his missionary activity (10:12-18): it was he who arrived first in Corinth, hence the others gather where they have not sown. With the foundation of domestic churches in the capital of Achaia, he shows strong confidence in the ability, characteristic of the Gospel, to ferment the whole region: slowly, the whole province will be evangelized (v. 16; cf Rom 15:23f).
- The Christians of Corinth are poor (cf 1Cor 1:26), and Paul makes the strong decision not to accept anything from them as payment (Mt 10:10; cf 1Cor 9). The “superapostles”, on the contrary, besides making their living out of predication, tailor the message to their own ends (11:4), forgetting perhaps that Jesus has been crucified (cf 1Cor 1:23; 2:2). Paul puts before the eyes of all their hidden intentions. He considers himself an apostle, but one devoid of privileges and identified as a servant of the communities. For him, honor is not to burden economically the poor believers.
- Paul’s boast is not in the power of appearances or in the privilege of being an apostle, but in sufferings supported for the cause of the Gospel. 2Cor 11:16-33 informs us about many dangers not recorded by Luke in the Acts. For example, the five times that the Jews have tortured Paul, inflicting on him thirty-nine blows. Paul affirms that three times he was beaten with a rod, while Luke talks only of one time, cf Acts 16:22f. Paul mentions three shipwrecks, and Luke barely narrates the fourth – Acts 27 – that had still to take place when Paul wrote these texts. This leads us to conclude that Paul is much more than what we know about him. The reason for all of this has already been presented in 1Cor 9:19-23.

- Paul has had an extraordinary experience of God, and regarding this we do not have other information except those written here. The thorn thrust into his flesh is another mysterious detail. Leaving speculations apart, this thorn reveals the weak side of every pastoral worker (compare with 4:7ff). God does not search for supermen as his collaborators, but weak persons that he strengthens with his grace. As a Pharisee, Paul was proudly self-sufficient. As a Christian, he recognizes and accepts his fragility, allowing grace to manifest in him all its power (12:1-10; cf Phil 4:13; 2Cor 2:14).
- Paul considers himself as the father of all the persons he has led to faith in Jesus Christ (1Cor 4:14-16; Philem 10). As a father, he wears and consumes himself for his children (see the opposite attitude in 11:20). Some Corinthians had maliciously insinuated that the international collection in favor of the poor in Jerusalem, going on for some time, (cf 1Cor 16:1f), would have been a clever trick devised by Paul to compensate for the expenses incurred in Corinth, without the communities noticing it (12:16). The second journey of Paul to Corinth was traumatic, and he fears that during the third the drama may happen again. Hence, his appeal for self-examination and (13:5) perfection (v. 9).
- The leave-taking (13:11-13) is characteristic of “brethren”, marked by joy, growth in faith and mutual consolation, in concord and in peace. It is the last request so that there may be peace and reconciliation may be attained (cf 6:1ff). The request is welcomed and it gives fruits (cf 1:1–2:13 + 7:5-16). The holy kiss was the fraternal greeting in the communities of Corinth. The final greeting (v. 13) puts the Christians in communion with the life of the Trinity.

Suggestions for a Pauline reading. 1. Compare the pioneering ways of Paul and Alberione. Does this suggest something to our mission today? 2. What teachings can we get from the “thorn in the flesh”? 3. Why does Paul feel strong in his weakness? 4. Compare the “mystical experience” of Paul with the “luminous night” and the “dream” of Alberione. Does this suggest something? 5. Do we find other important themes in 2 Cor 10-13? What are they?

3. 2Cor 1:1–2:13 + 7:5-16: “Blessed be the God of all consolation” (1:3)

Letter of consolation, written after Titus had achieved reconciliation.

- After the address and the greeting (1:1-2) we have a hymn of praise (vv. 3-7) for the consolation that flows from the reconciliation obtained, thanks to the mediation of Titus. Paul feels consoled and attributes this to God. But his consolation is above all of benefit to the Corinthians, the objects of his mission. Paul narrates (vv. 8-11) the sufferings he passed through in Ephesus (Asia), of which we know little. He talks of deadly danger and of liberation that makes us think of resurrection.
- Reasons of force majeure, maybe the ones indicated in 1:8-11, have prevented the realization of Paul’s plan to visit the Corinthians. This fact has been misinterpreted, and Paul takes advantage of the occasion to read the events in depth. His behavior follows that of Jesus because he is not ambiguous. Cf Mt 5:37.
- The Corinthians have isolated and punished the person who has caused the conflict against Paul. The task, however, is not finished, because the challenge is to win back the person, who has done wrong, in a way to avoid his exclusion.(cf Mt 18:15-20 and 1Cor 5:1-13). The recovery is done by means of forgiveness and the demonstration of tenderness (2Cor 2:5-13). The continuation of v. 13 is found in 7:5.
- After achieving peace in Corinth, Titus goes to meet Paul who had already left Ephesus and had gone to Macedonia. The good news fills him with consolation. “There are bad things that come for what is good”. The crisis in Corinth has revealed, in the faithful and in Paul, values that otherwise would not have been shown (7:5-16). Cf Jn 16:21f.

Suggestions for a Pauline reading. 1. The beginning of this letter is characterized by consolation. It comes from God and transfers into the apostle, reaching the faithful. Are we creators of consolation in our community? 2. How do we treat persons who commit mistakes? Does our esteem for our brother surpass his mistake and his weakness? 3. Comment on and deepen this statement: “Our errors are our teachers”. Are there other themes that deserve to be emphasized? What are they?

4. 2Cor 8: "Know the generosity of Jesus Christ" (8:9)

Paul urges the Corinthians to participate in the international collection against hunger and in favor of the poor Christians of Jerusalem (cf 1Cor 16:1-4. Compare 8:2 with Acts 17:4). And he uses strong arguments. The strongest of these is no other than Jesus, divested of everything in order to enrich all. Another strong argument is the equal partitioning of the manna at the time when God fed the Hebrews in the desert (Ex 16:18). The goal to be reached is equality, the result of sharing. Cf Lk 16:11-12; 1Tm 6:10; compare with 1Thes 2:1ff. Paul takes all the opportune precautions so that corruption may not contaminate the collection against hunger. The persons that have been chosen are trustworthy. Certainly, some suspects regarding the destination of the collection were circulating in Corinth. Cf 2Cor 12:16-18.

5. 2Cor 9: "God loves a cheerful giver" (9:7)

This is an open letter for the faithful of the region of Achaia, where for sure there were many communities founded out of the initiative of the Christians of Corinth. Cf 2Cor 10:15. Paul is probably in Macedonia (9:1), and his concern is joint help for the poor of Jerusalem. It is interesting to note the biblical texts cited as stimulus for joint sharing. The international collection against hunger is not just a simple collection. Paul calls it "service", "generous favor", "act of generosity", "sacred service", etc. The contribution must not be forced because it would not be generosity. We note Paul's concern to be transparent in the administration of others' money. (cf 1Cor 16:1-4; 2Cor 12:16-18).

Suggestions for a Pauline reading. 1. Chapters 8 and 9 suggest the deepening of some important themes, like solidarity (among communities or congregations), poverty (as vow or social plague) and administration of goods. Evangelical poverty is not sterile, because the Lord Jesus made himself poor in order to enrich many by means of his poverty. 2. What is there at the root of the vow of poverty? 3. How do you esteem the international solidarity in our Congregation?

III. BLESSED JAMES ALBERIONE AND THE SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

The indications of **exegetical character** guide us in the reading of the second letter of saint Paul to the Corinthians and they signal to us in simple form its editorial structure and the themes it treats. Furthermore, making use of the **various methods of biblical exegesis** and utilizing other **specialized studies**, each one can integrate and expand the presentation of the letter that has been offered here, based on one's cultural preparation and knowledge.

In view of application to the Pauline charism, let us see now how blessed James Alberione has read and made use of the contents of the second letter to the Corinthians. For this research, the data bank of the *Opera omnia* that is accessible to the whole Pauline Family turns out to be useful and effective. As for the **exegetical perspective**, also attentive consideration of the **interpretation** advanced by the Primo Maestro can be deepened and documented better through the contribution of all. On my part, in this annual letter I intend to limit myself to present some themes of the second letter to the Corinthians used to a greater extent by Fr. Alberione, not indulging in the eventual number of quotes, but freely choosing.

For reasons of simplicity we can articulate the reading made by the Founder around **two concerns**: understand the contents of 2Cor as **Christians** who live their faith inserted in the people of God, and as **Pauline apostles** sent to evangelize in communication. The two perspectives complete each other mutually because they put each Pauline in reciprocally fruitful attitudes: as readers of 2Cor from the perspective of every **baptized** person and, at the same time, as believers that have received a **particular charism** that leads them to be the source of a particular apostolic preaching activity within the ecclesial community.

1. Themes for the formation of the Christian

1.1. It may be useful to mention the **global resume** that blessed James Alberione offers regarding 2Cor: "After writing his first letter, St. Paul sent Titus to Corinth with another of his disciple, so that they would return to inform him about the state of the Church of

Corinth. He met the disciple probably in Philippi and from him he heard with great pleasure the great love that the people of Corinth had for him. Also hearing that there were in Corinth some who accused him as being inconstant, ambitious and usurping of the name of apostles, he hastened to write this letter which is a lengthy apology of his conduct and apostolate, first veiled and then open" (*Leggete le Sacre Scritture*, 241).

The synthesis puts in relief the arguments that mark the letter: saint Paul feels with joy that the Corinthians love him; however, since there are some who refuse him as an apostle, he writes a letter that is an apology of his identity as an apostle of Christ. The letter, therefore, is an **episode** of communication that exists between Paul and the community of Corinth; this communicative process involves **three poles of exchange**: saint Paul, the Corinthians who love him and some who in the community of Corinth refuse him.

Passing then from the general resume to the various parts of the letter, Fr. Alberione notes in this personal "apology" of the Apostle teachings about the faith understood as **love for God and neighbor** and as **phenomenon of apostolic communication**.

1.2. The citation of **2Cor 1:12** is the title of a tract of Primo Maestro published in *San Paolo* of March 1957: "*Testimonium conscientiae nostrae*" (the testimony of our conscience), now reproduced in the volume *Anima e corpo per il Vangelo* (pp. 263-278). In the context of the second letter to the Corinthians, this expression is used by saint Paul to initiate the defense of his ministry, explaining that the **testimony of his conscience** assures him that all his conduct in the world and, in particular with the Corinthians, has been guided by the "simplicity and transparency of God, not by carnal wisdom, but by the grace of God". Paul's actions are motivated by values indicated by God, not borrowed from some human wisdom.

The Alberionian pamphlet deals with the highest commitment in education: the **formation of conscience** face to face with the hypothesis advanced by a "new morality". Since the citations included are taken from a discourse of Pius XII of 23 March 1952, it is probable that in 1957 Fr. Alberione heard talks with more intensity, on the part of some in the Church, about the need to open up to a "**new morality**". He writes: "There is a new current of thought, the "new morality", the morality "of circumstances" or "of the situa-

tion". A morality that in the end is subjective; a morality of utility, of the comfortable, rather than of the honest; the morality of a particular and casual judgment, and therefore changeable; morality that creates interior and social chaos; morality that Pius XII has said is 'outside of Catholic faith and principles' (23-3-1952)" (*Anima e corpo per il Vangelo*, p. 267). With the understanding that he can have about it, Fr. Alberione sees in the current of thought of the "**morality of the situation**" a **real danger**: "They would desire to institute, or almost, a revision of the whole moral order and teaching. They would want to free it from the teaching of the Church, which they paint as sophisticated, casuistic, oppressive, restrictive...[They would want] intellectual and moral independence from Jesus Christ and from the Church" (*Ibidem*).

The experience of the condemnations of some movements of opinion on the part of the Holy See lived during the preceding years by Fr. Alberione, motivate this writing to put on guard every believer from forming a custom-made conscience, far from listening to the word of God mediated by the Church. The same concern is at the root of his clear reminder to the Paulines on the official bulletin of the Society of St. Paul: "If especially the aspirants and the young professed, then in proportion the perpetual professed and the priests, open their ears and eyes too much to the world, to its sayings and examples, they end up forming a worldly mentality" (*Id*, p. 272f).

What the Primo Maestro writes about the formation of conscience in reaction to the "morality of the situation", does not only reassume a condemnation of the papal magisterium of past years, it rather mirrors the concern to instil among Paulines an "adult" conscience that forms itself on the word of God, and that like every good educative work, does in such a way "that the person being educated makes himself independent of the educator within just limits" (*Id*, p. 263). An **adult conscience** that opposes a **subjective conscience** remains open to comparison above all with the word of God: "Only the one who does not walk has ever need of asking directions" (*Id*, p. 264). The wisdom of the believer and of the Pauline does not base itself on "carnal wisdom".

1.3. In **2Cor 3:6** saint Paul concludes: "The Letter kills, the Spirit gives life". The Apostle uses the opposition between "letter" and "Spirit" in order to make a comparison between the Law of Moses

and the teaching of Christ. The letter (= *gramma*) is the graphic sign traced on papyrus and in its totality is a complete text, but it is written; the Spirit on the other hand is a sign that does not need a graphic support because it is engraved in the hearts by God. When a text is not a dead letter but becomes a means of communication, saint Paul uses the term *epistolè* to give emphasis to the message transported by the writing.

In referring to the reading of the Scriptures, Fr. Alberione writes: "It is necessary to distinguish in the Bible the letter and the spirit of the letter. The first, as saint Paul says, kills, while the spirit vivifies. "Lettera enim occidit, spiritus autem vivificat". Indeed! The letter, if it is badly interpreted, can cause death to the soul" (*Leggete le Sacre Scritture*, 40). And talking to the Shepherdess Sisters about observance of the Constitutions, he explains: "There can be a sister who observes the Constitutions to the letter, but then fails deeply in her heart. Capture well the spirit: the letter kills, the spirit vivifies" (*Prediche alle Suore Pastorelle*, VIII, p. 24).

1.4. In the face of so many sufferings of the ministry, saint Paul in **2Cor 4:17-18** takes on courage: "for this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen".

Fr. Alberione uses many times this passage to encourage perseverance in the faith. He preaches, for example, to the Daughters of Saint Paul: "Every little sacrifice merits an eternal reward: *aeternum pondus gloriae*. ...As long as we do not come to understand that sanctity consists in patience with which we support our crosses, we can even spend twenty years in religious life without understanding anything about it; we may have read many spiritual books but we would not have learned anything about the science of the saints" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1940-1945* [1941], p. 120).

1.5. Wanting to emphasize the value of the acts of the historical today for the eschatological tomorrow, saint Paul writes in **2Cor 5:10**: "For all of us must appear before the tribunal of Christ, to receive each one the recompense of works done while in the body, whether reward or punishment".

Talking to the Daughters of Saint Paul, the Primo Maestro comments thus: "The one who exploits well his talents will have

in heaven a reward in proportion to the gains made on earth; the one who will have worked more for him, who will have loved with greater fervor, will receive a bigger reward.... He is not more clever or prudent who tries to do the least possible, but the one who is inexhaustible in his toils, in his inventions and pious shrewdness for the cause of good. He is not more clever who always postpones: I shall start doing well, make myself a saint later, convert myself finally one day. He is much more prudent who says: I start today, this very moment" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1929-1933* [1933], p. 161).

1.6. As he appeals to the generosity of the Corinthians for the collection in favor of the Church of Jerusalem, saint Paul in **2Cor 9:7** writes: "**God loves a cheerful giver**". Alluding to *Prov 22:8* in the translation of the LXX, the Apostle reminds that joyful sharing is approved by God with love.

In addressing the Daughters of Saint Paul, Fr. Alberione makes of it the following application: "Let us be thankful to God for the mission to which he has called us: let us talk about it with enthusiasm, with conviction, when we have to talk about it and then let us always be happy: "God loves a cheerful giver"; let us therefore banish the temptation of discouragement" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1940-1945* [1940], p. 51).

2. Themes for the formation of the Pauline apostle

2.1. Saint Paul in **2Cor 2:14-15** describes his apostolic ministry as a "**perfume**": "We are in fact for God the perfume of Christ among those who are saved".

Fr. Alberione recalls many times this affirmation, describing the effects of the Pauline apostolate: "Another apostolate: good example. The example of a righteous life when you do well your duty, when the person conforms to the will of God and does exactly and continually the duties of his state, then the example spreads out as the "*bonus odor Christi*", the good odor of Christ, spreads out. Others may also criticize, judge falsely and laugh, but deep down in their soul something remains. Example is a silent sermon and many times it reaches the heart than a sermon made up of words" (*Meditazioni per consacrare secolari*, 1976, p. 338f).

2.2. Being fully aware of human weakness, saint Paul reaffirms the **power of God** in the apostolic ministry in **2Cor 3:5**: “Our capacity comes from God who has made us fit ministers of the new covenant”.

Describing the nature of the Spiritual Exercises, Fr. Alberione recalls that it is a time of “reflection while praying.It is not simply abandoning oneself to the workings of grace; but of being active so as to prepare the soil for the divine seed; it is to cooperate with its birth and growth and to lead it to full maturity, always remembering that we are cooperators: ‘not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our competence is from God’. ...Therefore, weave together in a holy way prayer and action” (*Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, I, 185).

2.3. Aware of his inadequacy for the apostolic ministry to reveal the face of God in Christ, saint Paul writes in **2Cor 4:7**: “But we hold this treasure in **vessels of clay**, so that it may appear that this extraordinary power comes from God and not from us”.

Talking to the Daughters of Saint Paul about propagating the word of God, Fr. Alberione explains: “The Church exalts this apostolate of the word of God; the Church has given to it the most beautiful names. The will of God is for us clear and precise. It gives you the divine blessings. A great treasure therefore in your hands. But, alas, this treasure is in vessels of clay... Only if the Gospel will fall, also your mission will fall. This on the part of God! On our part the matter is different. We must be faithful and correspond” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1934-1939* [1936], p. 418).

2.4. After his encounter with Christ, Paolo feels himself **pushed to be an apostle**, as he affirms in **2Cor 5:14**: “The love of Christ drives us”, and to take on the role of the apostle, that is, of one sent: “We therefore act as **ambassadors of Christ** and it is as if God exhorted by means of us” (**2Cor 5:20**). This apostolic ardor and audacity are used by the Primo Maestro in numerous occasions.

Referring to the apostolate, Fr. Don Alberione writes: “Everybody to the apostolate! Everything for the apostolate! Is there in us such love for God as to desire that this God be known, loved and that his kingdom come? Needed is a fire in the soul with two flames: love for God and love for souls. In love is life: ‘*The love of Christ drives us*’” (*Per un rinnovamento spirituale*, p. 30).

To the Daughters of Saint Paul, he proposes the question: “Today, before Jesus, the Master of the Apostles, let us examine the zeal we have had until now in our apostolate, what is the love that has pushed us, whether it is love for ourselves or love for Christ. Saint Paul was not afraid to say: ‘*The love of Christ pushes us*’. Is it the love of Christ that pushes you to so many efforts?” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1929-1933* [1933], p. 203).

Reflecting on the human vocation, the Primo Maestro says: “Among the principal and most noble of careers and missions, the most principal and noble is the vocation to save souls. By it we carry on the highest and most delicate task of Jesus the Savior.... Then the most important part of this mission is entrusted to those who work for the good press. Saint Paul exalted this mission of saving souls when he said: *We act as ambassadors of Christ*” (*Mese a San Paolo*, 1918, p. 14).

2.5. His treatment of some themes, sometimes in strong tones, does not subtract from Saint Paul his joy deep down: “I am filled with consolation, pervaded with joy notwithstanding all my trials” (**2Cor 7:4**). Describing his rapport with the Corinthians, Saint Paul uses terms expressing great affection and desire for reciprocity. Trials reveal the supernatural character of the apostolic mission.

The Primo Maestro makes use of this affirmation to comment: “Let us reflect: for us who believe, every deprivation, every difficulty, every fear borne for love of God becomes merit. Hence like Saint Paul we will be able to exclaim: “I overflow with joy in every tribulation”, but what about those who are not propped by faith and comforted by hope?” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1940-1945* [1940], p. 63).

2.6. As argument to justify the validity of his ministry, saint Paul lists the **efforts** undertaken for preaching: **2Cor 11:16-33**.

Fr. Alberione often refers to this passage, above all in view of our apostolate. Talking about **fortitude**, he explains: “The second level consists in sacrificing, if it were necessary, our own freedom, reputation, and life itself, for the glory of God and for the good of our neighbor. This is the fortitude practiced by the apostle Paul. Also to save souls, he exposed himself to every kind of danger: “Often in trips amidst dangers of rivers, dangers from assassins, dangers on the part of my countrymen, dangers from the gentiles, in the cities,

in the deserts, in the sea, from false brethren" (2Cor 11:26)" (*Le grandezze di Maria*, 1938, p. 93).

And during the month of Spiritual Exercises at Ariccia, Fr. Alberione comments: "To the Corinthians he writes about the pains that accompany the apostolate... Two reflections: 1) By their profession, the true religious and much more the priest should love sacrifice and suffering; 2) should desire to give the greatest spiritual and even corporal good to his neighbor" (*Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, III, 57).

2.7. Sufferings accepted for preaching are supplemented by particular spiritual graces, but saint Paul wants to consider as his criterion of evangelization only his **weakness: 2Cor 12:1-10**.

Often the Primo Maestro refers to the divine answer given to the triple request of saint Paul: "**My grace is enough for you**" (2Cor 12:9). Applying it to the spiritual life, he comments: "It is not necessary that we be surprised for having a similar heart. Some are so proud that they do not want to adapt to a heart full of temptations, vanity, attachments, bad desires, vain sentiments, etc. They are so proud that they do not want to convince themselves that they are persons of this world, hence made up of mud" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1929-1933* [1932], p. 516).

Exhorting to imitate saint Paul, Fr. Alberione says: "Besides knowing him, imitate him. He, too, was subject to many temptations. And when he had prayed to the Lord for liberation, the Lord had answered him: Ah, no! My grace is enough for you. Therefore, if you show your weakness, it is by grace – the Lord wanted to say – that God reveals his power, the power of grace; because in spite of struggles, he sanctified his life always for the better. Therefore, imitate saint Paul." (*Alle Pie Discepole del Divin Maestro*, 1965, 364).

The Founder uses the phrase: "**When I am weak, then I am strong**" (2Cor 12:10) to reflect on the apostolate of suffering, an integral part of the Pauline charism: "When we are reduced to inaction because of pains, maladies, we can work more widely and more deeply than with action: *For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (*Prediche alle Suore Pastorelle*, IV, p. 250).

Explaining the Constitutions to the Daughters of St. Paul, the Founder exhorts them: "Delay your becoming elderly, that is, do not put yourself so easily among the number of the aged and to feel yourselves already in need of rest. There are no pensioners in re-

ligious life; our pension is in heaven. Hence, use that amount of strength and activity that remain. "*When I am weak, then I am strong*" (2Cor 12:10), because when I offer also my suffering, I do the will of God with my heart; therefore, I can be more useful to myself and still be useful to my neighbor" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo-Spiegazione delle Costituzioni* [1961], 412).

From what has been shown, it becomes evident that Fr. Alberione's referring to saint Paul is always in view of spiritual formation for apostolic aims: **spirituality for mission**. Each one can add to these excerpts, drawing from the documentation that can be traced in *Opera omnia*.

IV. THE PAULINES AND THE SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

After having reflected on the second letter to the Corinthians with the contribution of **exegesis** and the **mediation** made by blessed James Alberione, I offer some pathway of research from which to draw new consolation and energy for the Pauline charism as lived in our **present-day context**. In this way, we put in practice the constant invitation of our Founder to read, meditate and imitate saint Paul as our Father and model.

The attribution of "**Pauline**" that characterizes our charism guarantees us that the vocation, the consecration and the mission of every one of us and of all our communities found in the five continents express an **inseparable unity**: Pauline spirituality and new evangelization through communication. Therefore, when we appeal to the "Pauline spirituality", it is necessary that we go back to the life and teaching of Primo Maestro who through this expression has in mind the **integrality** of the Pauline spirituality: Jesus Master Way, Truth and Life, Mary Queen of the Apostles and saint Paul; but also the **quality** of this spirituality that finds in saint Paul the most complete example of Christification (cf *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae*, 160). Hence, the Pauline charism is made up of two inseparable elements: **the spirituality of saint Paul and evangelization in communication**.

It would be an **error** to hypothesize of substituting saint Paul as a source of our spirituality with a generic one or, worse, with another particular one. It would be **to corrupt** our charism in the same way as to desire to replace, with another apostolate, communica-

tion at the service of evangelization. In both cases we would hear loudly and clearly the reminder of our Founder to remain “**in our path**” without deviations and to preserve “**our color**” so as not to become unrecognizable: “Let us remember well that S. Paul is our father, our provider. Let us love him as his children. Let us have recourse to him in various necessities. We must not stray or separate ourselves from the right way and take a wrong route” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1950-1953* [1951], p. 233).

Let us look at the second letter to the Corinthians from a **three-fold perspective**: to identify better our Christian faith, to live our faith as a community and to give witness to it in contemporary communication.

1. Themes to better identify a missionary faith

1.1. It is only for ease of presentation that I refer to personal faith lived by the Christian community and testified by a particular charism. In truth, as in the life of saint Paul, these three components **refer to each other** constantly. Since the faith of **every baptized** and, with more reason, that of an **apostle** is always **fusion**: an individual vocation that completes itself in a community committed to a particular mission.

We can trace this fruitful reciprocity in **2Cor 1:3-7**: Paul blesses God “who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God”. Having found in God consolation for his own ups and downs, Paul can console all those who are afflicted by offering through the exercise of his apostolic activity the same consolation from which he has drawn strength.

As we can observe, events in the faith of Paul as a **believer** assume a **communitarian dimension** by means of his **preaching**.

In the wake of this experience of Paul, we can examine our life of personal faith that is called to become communitarian testimony through the apostolate of communication. Are our reason for being, at whose base is the supernatural vision of our existence as believers of Christ, as well as our communitarian practices and our life of prayer characterized by this torrent of “consolation” which from God flows to each of us and from each of us to others through the testimony of preaching in communication?

Do we not surrender sometimes to the temptation of living our spirituality and our testimony in communication as isolated blocks? Is it a solitary spirituality that does not take into account the apostolate, a desire to give testimony to others about something that does not come from personally lived faith or an apostolic commitment lived as mercants of communication? **In what way the concern to “console those who find themselves in any affliction” is strongly present when we feel ourselves “consoled by God?”**.

Talking of the presence of the readers in prayer, the Primo Maestro has an extraordinary description: “Consider their souls; this, after communion and during your Visit. Not only is Jesus way for me, he is also way for my readers, way for those to whom I want to turn, for whom I want to inculcate something. Jesus is truth; it’s not enough that you do your spiritual reading for yourself. You are assigned an editorial office and what truth do you want to communicate? Ask for the grace of an increase in faith for us and then to communicate it to the reader or to the group of persons you want to reach; and, if you pray, pray for all your readers, pray to have the grace to understand their needs, to find the ways to arrive at their hearts... So then you have in your hearts all your readers during communion, and you have them all in your hearts when you make your visit to Jesus Master” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo-Spiegazione delle Costituzioni* [1961], 433). These words are for Paulines of all times a true model of apostolic prayer.

1.2. Seduced by the experience of his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, saint Paul lives his **faith as a gift** to be communicated; as he says with conviction in **2Cor 3:5-6**, his entire ministry is the work of God’s power: “Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”.

Even in the Pauline charism the gift of faith is not exclusive of the single person or confined to the inside of the religious community, but is diffusive. It is a gift with open and altruistic dimension. Our spirituality, our Pauline devotions and practices of piety produce a communication process that the Primo Maestro, quoting

saint Bernard, defines as “**valley**”, a depression that gets filled and when it is full, overflows: “Be valleys, not canals. The valley fills up first and then flows over; but first it gets filled” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1940-1945* [1941], p. 272).

If, explaining the statement of saint Paul regarding the divine power that “**makes ministers competent**” through the Alberionian image of the “**valley**”, we concluded that only if we are full of God can we communicate him to others, we would be repeating something obvious. For us Paulines there is something more: **communication** is the reality that we use both to live our faith and to witness to it before others. In simple words, we cannot live personal faith in a “generic” way and then pretend to be able to communicate it in the original form of “communication”. Faith witnessed in the language and form of communication cannot be improvised during the **apostolic moment**; it must first be **lived** in the form of communication on the Pauline personal and community level. The reason is that communication, when it is taken up as a new form of evangelization, is not a simple “**instrument**” but a true “**culture**” (cf John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 37c).

Just as the preaching of Paul is the mirror of the power of God, so the Pauline apostolate must transpire the Pauline spirituality. The Founder has left us a splendid explanation about the relation between piety and apostolate: “You must live from your apostolate, and this not because of some concession of the Church but because nature requires it. Let’s make another example: suppose an institute of religious lives the contemplative life and makes chocolate or lace or similar things. Here, what is done is disjointed from the works of piety. Therefore, piety does not produce the apostolate. On the contrary, your apostolate must be born of your piety and must be done in such a way that the apostolate itself gives nourishment” (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo 1950-1953* [1951], p. 221f).

The Pauline apostolate cannot degenerate into a **simple work for sustenance**, as would happen if we considered as our true commitment, for example, a contemplative life. In our apostolate the experience of faith that we live becomes witness not only when we employ some **instruments**, but also when we propose our faith in the **culture** of communication. We are called to “communicate to others what we have contemplated” (*Contemplata aliis tradere*, says S. Thomas).

2. Themes in order to live faith as a community

2.1. Referring to the danger of death he had escaped, saint Paul thanks the Corinthians: “From so deadly a peril God has liberated us... thanks to the help of your prayer for us, so that for the favor obtained for us by many persons, thanksgiving may be made on the part of many for us” (**2Cor 1:11**). Paul interprets the events of his personal life as the fruit of the prayer of petition and thanksgiving of the community.

We know well the insistence of Fr. Alberione regarding the “**apostolate of prayer**” in the Pauline mission: “Give not only the book and bring home the offerings, but accompany it with your prayer, so that the persons who receive it may benefit from it and with the light that comes from God by means of the book or the periodical, they may correspond and turn their thoughts towards the end, to God, to Paradise. All the readers should be borne in your mind” (*Pensieri*, 1972, p. 139).

If it is true that the Pauline mission profits, by will of the Founder, from the prayer of the Pauline cooperators and the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master, in the Congregation are also praiseworthy the **initiatives of prayer** that involve our readers, listeners, viewers, Internet surfers. Prayer realizes spiritual reciprocity between the community of the Paulines and the community reached by means of apostolic activities: through an act that is considered as commerce takes place in reality an exchange of spiritual realities.

In this historic moment, the physiognomy of the Congregation shows the presence of elderly Paulines, the sick ones and others not directly committed in the apostolate of communications. To them the Founder presents “**the apostolate of suffering**” as constitutive of the apostolate of communication: “The Institute needs someone who suffers for all, so that penance for sins that are committed may be done. One who knows to have received this mission of suffering should not rebel against God’s will and think of self as useless to the Congregation. It is the most noble apostolate, the most hidden, the most necessary” (cf *Calendario Paolino*, 1959, 14 September). On their part, the Superiors at every level, those in charge of the apostolate, of vocation promotion and of formation **must** assume the commitment of making them participants of the life of the Congregation: the **duty of information** regarding what is being done in the

Congregation is due to all Paulines and in particular to all those who for various reasons are not immersed in activity. The information must offer **significant reasons** for prayer, suffering and detachment from “work”.

2.2. After he postponed a journey he promised to the Corinthians, some accuse saint Paul as being indecisive, as being between ‘yes’ and ‘no’; for them his answer is: “As surely as God is faithful, our word towards you is not ‘yes’ and ‘no!’” (2Cor 1:18). Because Christ has been the definitive ‘yes’ of God, through him the community answers with its ‘amen’ (cf 2Cor 1:20). To the ‘yes’ said by Christ, Paul, his collaborators and the community of Corinth answer ‘amen’.

With due precautions, this dialog between ‘yes’ and ‘amen’ can be applied to the Pauline community where, today, various generations of Paulines often live together. Fidelity to the Pauline vocation, consecration and mission is required from each of us and from all our communities with perseverance. Remaining basic among us is the charity of “good example” coming from fidelity: “Charity – Paul VI says – must be the active hope of what others can become with the help of our fraternal support” (*Evangelica testificatio*, 39).

When the community pronounces with **persevering fidelity** its ‘amen’, placing at the center of its existence the ‘yes’ of Christ, it places the conditions for accepting the young people who want to know the Pauline life and creates the right environment for a successful and satisfying formation.

In fact, it happens that with the passing of years or because of particular happenings, some Paulines **weaken** the enthusiasm of their ‘amen’ to the Christian, religious and Pauline life and become obstacles to vocation promotion, formation and the future itself of a Circumscription. In the Congregation there has been and still there is the **possibility** of pardon, conversion and resumption from difficult moments; in the same way, the Congregation is aware that all those who commit themselves to live seriously and for supernatural reasons in the Pauline life, have the right to be **protected** against those who by their actions, words, and without feeling the urge to make themselves better, put at risk the identity itself of common life.

2.3. After experiencing sufferings and risking death, saint Paul reminds the Corinthians: “All of us must appear before the tribunal of Christ, to receive each one the recompense of works done in the body, whether good or evil” (2Cor 5:10).

The **eschatological dimension** of the Christian life is present in a strong manner in saint Paul and in blessed Alberione: they look at human existence from the perspective of eternity; they live the earthly realities as anticipation of realities that will be transformed one day by the power of God.

Treatment of the topics of life and death, reward and punishment, human freedom and divine justice occupy a place of importance in the life of faith and teaching of the Founder, above all during the Spiritual Exercises and Monthly Retreats. When we read these texts, we notice the result to which he tended: not a paralysis of works for the benefit of an obsession for the salvation of the soul, but an apostolic operational **mobilization** that had to come from the meditation of eternal truths; a conscience that is enlightened and formed on the journey of existence and on its emerging in God, capable of motivating apostolic life thanks to supernatural reasons.

In the context of a society that seems to like removing the inevitability of old age, sickness, death and social responsibility for its actions, the Pauline community – during the periods of continuing formation, in addition to spiritual exercises, monthly retreats and daily meditation – should reflect in its apostolic initiatives the **joy** of a Christian life characterized by eternity. Our apostolate is called to propose and to show accomplished examples of **spiritual rebirth**: “If one is in Christ, he is a new creature; the former things are gone, new things are born!” (2Cor 5:17).

3. Themes to characterize the Pauline apostolate

3.1. Also taking into account the warnings of scholars, from the experience of saint Paul as described in the second letter to the Corinthians, we can extract a **profile of the apostle**.

He writes: “No, we do not lord it over your faith, but we are collaborators of your joy; because as far as faith is concerned, you are firm” (2Cor 1:24). The apostle is a **collaborator of the joy of the believers**.

He thanks God who “wafts through us in the whole world the perfume of his knowledge. In fact, we are the perfume of Christ among those who are saved and those who go to ruin” (2Cor 2:14-15). The apostle is the **perfume of Christ**: odor of death for some and odor of life for others.

He justifies himself, to distinguish himself from other preachers: “We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus, Messiah and Lord; as for us, we are your servants in Christ” (2Cor 4:5). The apostle **does not preach himself** and is a **servant of believers**.

He shows the clear awareness of not being the owner of what he preaches, but of being sent by God: “And everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation... So we are ambassadors for Christ, and it is as if God exhorted by means of us” (2Cor 5:18,20). The apostle does a **ministry of reconciliation** in the style of an **ambassador**.

As a mediator of God, he exhorts the faithful: “Since we are his collaborators, we exhort you to not receive the grace of God in vain” (2Cor 6:1). The apostle is **God’s collaborator**.

Awareness of the task received from God influences his conduct: “We do not give motive of scandal to anybody, so that our ministry may not be blamed, but in all things we present ourselves as ministers of God” (2Cor 6:3-4). The apostle is a **minister of God**.

His work of evangelization is in full relief: he experiences not only opposition, sufferings and sadness; but reflecting with calm, knows how to find even motives of consolation and joy. The apostle knows how to **enjoy good** and **loves** his faithful: 2Cor 2:4; 6:11-13; 7:2-7,9,13-16; 11:11; 12:15. His is a father’s love to the point of being interpreted as **jealousy**: 2Cor 11:2.

3.2. In the face of the difficulties of the mission, saint Paul distances himself from others who preach Christ: “Because we are not like many who traffic in the word of God, but talk in Christ, in the presence of God, with clarity, as messengers of God” (2Cor 2:17). He distinguishes his ministry from those who “**traffic in the word of God**”. The reason of the polemic of the apostle is not evident; the fact remains that in evangelization it is possible to fall into the serious deviation of manipulating the word of God for human motives.

Further on, he returns to the theme to qualify his mission: “Hence, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this min-

istry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God’s word; but by open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.... For we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus as Messiah and Lord; as for us, we are your servants in Christ” (2Cor 4:1-2,5). Paul assures that he “**does not falsify the word of God**” and “**does not preach himself**”.

To distinguish himself from false preachers, he calls his adversaries ‘superapostles’: “I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superapostles; I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you” (2Cor 11:5). And he gives explanation about the same persons: “For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (2Cor 11:13), concluding further on: “You should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these superapostles, even though I am nothing” (2Cor 12:11).

3.3. The **positive profile** of the apostle and the **negative characteristics** that flow from the consideration of the experience of saint Paul in the community of Corinth, invite us **Pauline-apostles** of today to reflect constantly on our identity. After having understood well who the ‘superapostles’ are condemned by saint Paul, we can trace what in us or in others today opposes our positive identity as Pauline-apostles.

I do not want to linger on the criticism that already during the time of the Founder points at us Paulines as “**merchants of the word of God**” because of the industrial means that we use for the apostolate, and for the fact that our testimony passes through an exchange that is by nature commercial. That even today we are considered such by somebody, can be a stimulus for an examination of conscience; but I believe that it is an unfounded accusation, if the real situation of our Congregation at world level is known.

The path of reflection that I would like to suggest rather refers to how can it happen that in an ecclesial community at universal level as our Congregation is, and that has become aware of the role of communication for evangelization, there are some who **in practice and in theoretical research** factually put in doubt that communication is an **integral “new evangelization”**. This attitude, on the practical level, results in initiatives that transfer by force to evangeliza-

tion through communication, the modalities of evangelization of the parish type; while, on the theoretical level, it is expressed through theological and ecclesial arguments that the “true” faith is the one lived in interpersonal and group relationships; communication can only be “an instrument”.

As continuers of the work and convictions of blessed James Alberione, we must defend our apostolic identity. On the **practical level**: the Paulines are convinced that the mercy of God acts in mysterious ways and, therefore, can make use of even a type of communication of the faith that with naturalness adapts to communication what is proper of parochial catechesis. This certainty, which allows freedom of use in communication, we claim also for ourselves: we use communication harnessing all its expressions and the rules of its language. For us communication requires a process of “**inculturation**” of the faith, not a simple **transposition**; this conviction is confirmed even by the teachings of the universal magisterium of the Church regarding communication. On the **theoretical level**: the Paulines do not pretend to limit with absolute theories the infinite and mysterious ways of a God who “does not break the bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick” (Mt 12:20). The variety of communication allows encounter between God and the men and women of our time; and the testimonies of gratitude that come from our recipients are the best theoretical support of it. Communication is not “**a veil**” to our Gospel (cf 2Cor 4:3a).

Taken directly from our Founder, these convictions enlighten us in the face of the **danger** of doubting evangelization in communication and of falling back to the traditional form of the parish. The Founder has been explicit in proposing communication as the **typical way** to evangelize at all times according to the Pauline charism.

3.4. Beside the true apostle and the false apostle, saint Paul in the second letter to the Corinthians describes also the **community of the faithful** who have benefited from his work of evangelization.

Thinking of how it has accepted his letters, he invites the community to full and correct understanding: “I hope that you will fully understand, as you have already partly understood us, that we are your boast, as you will be ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus” (2Cor 1:13b-14). Between the apostle and the community there is a **mutual boast** in eschatological perspective.

He explains that, according to the current custom, he does not need letters of recommendation to be accepted well because “our letter is you yourselves, written in our hearts, known and read by all men, because it is known that you are the letter of Christ prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2Cor 3:2-3). The evangelized community of Corinth is in itself “**a letter**”, “**a document**” written with the Spirit of the living God.

Inviting the Corinthians to not deviate from the preaching they received, he emphasizes: “What accord is there between the temple of God and idols? We are the temple of the living God” (2Cor 6:16). The community is “**a temple of the living God**”, not an ensemble of believers who maneuver between a faith lived externally and a life tending towards paganism.

In view of the collection for the Church of Jerusalem, he exhorts the community to be characterized for its generous solidarity: “Let each one give according to what he has decided in his heart, not with sadness or due to pressure: God loves a cheerful giver” (2Cor 9:7). The **joy of giving** must motivate solidarity.

Among the possible applications, we can show the communicative rapport that is established between the apostolic activities of the Paulines and the faithful of “our parish through media”, deepening the **ecclesiological description** of saint Paul for whom the community is **a letter, a document written with the Spirit of the living God**.

In the process of the **Pauline apostolic communication**, the one who is at the root of the message and assures its beneficial effects is the Spirit of God; the Paulines are the collaborators of God, and the community made up of readers, listeners, viewers and Internet surfers, is the temple of the living God always being built. In reality, the effort of “**writing**” on the part of Paulines and the availability of the recipients to “**interpret**” are not reduced to a simple human process, inasmuch as activity in the light of faith draws from the life environment of the Spirit of God.

3.5. The **quality** of saint Paul’s evangelization moulds the **identity** of the community of Corinth through an **apostolic style** willed by God himself: on one hand, efforts and sufferings; on the other, the gift of the encounter on the road to Damascus and of particular

mystical graces. The total donation to Christ on the part of Paul and the extraordinary gifts received, when put at the service of evangelization, certainly produce conversions, but also big efforts and sufferings. Everything, however, is achieved not through the ability of saint Paul, but through the power of God: **“My grace is enough for you”** (2Cor 12:9). To deepen this, the passages where he talks about his weaknesses, fatigues and sufferings in evangelization can be read: **2Cor 4:7-12,16; 6:3-10; 11:6-33; 13:9**. Successively, the principal passage regarding his special graces can be examined: **2Cor 12:1-10**.

The mystical experience of saint Paul is not exempt from contrasts in the work of evangelization. So much so that he asks God for three times to deliver him from the “thorn of the flesh” (2Cor 12:7), receiving the answer: **“My grace is enough for you; my power expresses itself in weakness”**. The Apostle assumes and assimilates this answer, seeing in it the apostolic style reserved by God for him: “Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2Cor 12:10). If God assures that his **power expresses itself in weakness**, who is he to not subject himself to this divine style, accepting the **condition of weakness** to give way to the **power** of God?

Saint Paul and Fr. Alberione, the first in the work of evangelization of the pagans, the second in the commitment to evangelize in communication, have personally experienced the divine style of **human weakness** placed at the service of **divine power**. Both of them, according to different plans of Providence and at different periods, have been **pioneers** in the ecclesial community for a **“new evangelization”**.

In his letter, saint Paul explains his evangelizing strategy: “...we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ. We do not boast beyond limits in the labors of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else’s sphere of action” (2Cor 10:14-16).

As for him, upon starting the first Congregations of the Pauline Family, blessed James Alberione knows well that he is not the first, nor does he pretend to become the best in making good use of the

press and of mass media for evangelization (his love for historical knowledge has prevented him from having a wrong idea about his work). But from the beginning he has **clear ideas** about the physiognomy of evangelization through the press.

Observing the failure of so many attempts in the Catholic area, in the bulletin *Unione Cooperatori Buona Stampa* he notes: “The mistake is much ours. We have thought of the good press as an outside work, not as a sacred mission that is nourished by prayer and grows aided by grace” (cf *La primavera paolina*, p. 648). And in the face of the lack of Catholic journals, he further clarifies: “They do not exist because there are no Apostles to do them: it is not enough to be learned, to be literati, or to be adept at administration. To work in the Good Press, Apostles are needed who love souls for the glory of God and do not fear to ascend Calvary and to die on the cross with Jesus Christ. Your work is to look for them, ours is to cultivate them; of God is to create in them what is needed for the new apostolate” (*Id*, p. 660).

Taking hint from this Pauline–Alberionian pioneering spirit, we Paulines of today can ask ourselves if we preserve in the Church our frontline identity to evangelize in communication. The wealth of the universal magisterium in communication and the concrete situation of our Congregation turn to us and urge us, so that with the passing of time we may not run the risk of becoming archeologists from pioneers that we are.

Dear brothers,

If we want “to be Saint Paul living today” in the spirit of Fr. Alberione, meditation on the second letter to the Corinthians offers to everyone of us, to our communities and to the whole Congregation a timely and fitting help.

With fraternal affection.

Rome, 25 January 2008

Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul

Fr. Silvio Sassi
Superior General

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January 2008 – Pro manuscripto

The logo chosen in common accord between the Society of St Paul and the Daughters of St Paul to characterise every initiative realised during the **Pauline Year** (28 June 2008 – 29 June 2009) is a visible synthesis of the specific contribution which Paulines intend to offer to the mobilisation of all the ecclesial community. The text "Pauline Year 2008-2009" is the anchor that guides the interpretation of the lines and colours utilised.

The writing speaks of the event itself, but at the same time encapsulates the interpretation that history is an encounter between time that passes and Providence: it is enough to think of ways of dating in times past: "Year of the Lord" following the date. The adjective "Pauline" is strictly bound to St Paul, thus to an spiritual and eternal dimension.

The logo of the **Society of St Paul** is the possible encounter between a broken straight line (in black) and an oblique line, almost spiral (in red), marked by the text "St Paul". The logo of the **Daughters of St Paul** is the coming together of a stylized representation of the world (world map with parallels, in black) and of the initial capital letter P of the world "Pauline" (in red).

The logo of the **Pauline Year** takes the lines and colours of two diverse logos engraving in them a dynamism that recalls either the form of the earth or the attempt of the coming together of the colours black and red through an allusion of the strength of circularity that creates the conditions for a major involvement.

The call to the forms and colours of the two logos is completed by the warmth of a line ideally circular, yellow in colour, that goes around the earth. The line is composed of small distinct segments that alludes to the apostolic journeys of St Paul and to the products of a technology always most specialized which circumvents the earth.

With this visible synthesis, Paulines, want to participate in the celebration of the universal apostolic dynamism of Paul (yellow line) with the specific charism of communication that, through time, is represented by the lines, straight and round, and by the colours red and black.