



"Let yourself be transformed" ...in the vision and valorisation of the Pauline Co-operators

(Giuseppe Altamore¹)

"The hierarchy should promote the apostolate of the laity, provide it with spiritual principles and support, direct the conduct of this apostolate to the common good of the Church, and attend to the preservation of doctrine and order." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 24). One could start from these words of the Sacred Council for a renewed commitment to building a new relationship with the Pauline Co-operators and with lay co-workers in general, who are not mere employees but real operators at the service of the Pauline mission. As baptised, in fact, "the laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3).

Faced with the challenges presented in the Preparatory Document for the XI General Chapter, loyal and fraternal collaboration with the lay co-workers is vital for the future of the Congregation. Being part of such a demanding undertaking is certainly a privilege but also a great challenge. The state of participation of the Pauline Co-operators, at least in Italy, presents elements of great fragility. The current presence of the laity in our Province is largely a legacy of the past. The average age is rather high and the activities carried out are essentially concentrated in prayer groups, catechesis and apostolate, especially in diffusion of the Bible, books and periodicals. Some groups are also involved in the cultural animation of the region, through ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. These are men and women who live Pauline spirituality with a certain intensity, as rarely happens among lay people who are not Co-operators and who collaborate in apostolic activities in a more incisive way every day. This is a paradox which I will try to clarify later.

On the one hand there are the Co-operators who are an integral part of the Pauline Family but do not participate actively in apostolic activities. On the other hand, there are employees and co-workers who are immersed every day in the living body of the apostolic works, with tasks of great responsibility in the creation of content, in economic sectors and in the management of personnel, very often without the necessary awareness of being part of an evangelical mission. This is the paradox to which I alluded above. If we observe in the light of modern managerial theories what happens in non-confessional companies, we see that in order to produce even a bolt the mission is referred to, precisely because the worker, at different levels, must be able to have a vision that goes well beyond the simple productive and technical objective that can evidently be alienating. This often gives rise to a strong sense of belonging and an aptitude for teamwork. Objectives that

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in our organisations appear seriously weakened, with effects that we can all understand. So we need to work in the two fields of lay involvement: Co-operators and lay employees. Both should be promoted in all ways, the former because they are already part of the Family, the latter because they are in fact "Co-operators" and as we have seen they have an impact on the production of content.

From the time I have been a member of the National Direction of Pauline Co-operators, we have begun a project that has enabled the implementation of various initiatives. Among these, I would like to mention the series of meetings held in Lodi that allowed us to involve a large and attentive audience. An experience that should continue with meetings in which we will talk about cooking in the Scriptures with the presence of a cook, a nutritionist and a biblical scholar. It is a way to open up to an audience not necessarily made up of practising people. Initiatives of this kind should be placed in a more general context and harmonized with the activities of periodicals, books and other means in such a way as to enhance as much as possible the Co-operators' commitment and apostolic activities themselves. In this direction, Co-operators should be more involved in the concrete programmes of the Pauline Family. Greater empowerment could produce interesting fruits. In this regard, the possibility of involving a Pauline Co-operator as an observer in the Provincial Chapter could be considered.

The promotion of advanced forms of collaboration deserves careful consideration. With regard to "de facto co-operators", employees of the various companies, there is a need for serious reflection on these points: formation, promotion of a sense of belonging, personal enhancement and caring for relationships. The first point is part of an old programme that has never been implemented. In principle, every new employee should be trained in the mission: knowledge of the aims of the St Paul Society, the Pauline charism, the function of our apostolic works, and so on. There is much work to be done regarding the promotion of the sense of belonging, a point which is partly linked to promotion, in other respects it is related to the Pauline leadership and their ability to bear witness. The maximum commitment is also required to promote relationships. The recent tensions have certainly had a significant impact on the sense of belonging.