



## **"Let yourself be transformed" ...in the Pauline integral formation**

(Fr. Danilo A. Medina L., SSP)

The fourth challenge of the preparatory document for our upcoming XI General Chapter highlights the need to work towards an integral formation oriented towards our mission, which makes possible a change of mentality and makes us capable of a fruitful dialogue with today's world, which we are called to save as Paulines. In the light of this approach, I consider it appropriate to return to and deepen the four essential aspects on which the emphasis and attention are placed, considering that they complement each other.

### ***Integrity of Formation***

Inspired by the teachings of our Blessed Founder and those of the Magisterium of the Church, our normative documents are sufficiently clear and precise on the theme of formation, especially when they insist on integrality, which is typical characteristic of Pauline life in general, and is greatly so when it is applied to this specific field: "*Pauline formation must be unitary, that is, tending toward a "vital synthesis", and integral, such as to involve the whole person without leaving gaps, since the whole person hands himself over to God through the Congregation*" (RF,46)<sup>1</sup>. The difficulties come up, however, at the time of putting this ideal into practice.

In the initial stages, a good distribution of activities during each day, each week and each year is very helpful for an integral formation. The task becomes more difficult when we focus on ongoing formation, since generally those of us who consider ourselves "adults", tend rather to relativize the timetables, and often end up favouring some of the "wheels" of the Pauline wagon to the detriment of another or all the others. Perhaps we should carefully fix our gaze on Jesus, who, although "*walked through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every illness and infirmity*" (Mt 9:35), often "*withdrew to deserted places to pray*" (Lk 5:36); and he also knew how to share his life with the community of his disciples, even considering moments of rest: "*He said to them, "Come aside, you alone, to a deserted place, and rest a while."*" (Mc 6.31). Likewise, at other times he went to the synagogue to study and pray with the word of God, for example, at Nazareth (cf. Lk 4:16-30), or at Capernaum (cf. Lk 4:31-39). He even had time to visit his friends and share both pleasant and painful moments with them (cf. Lk 10:38-42; Jn 11:1ff; 12:1ff).

### ***In view of the mission***

On this aspect too, the Founder's teaching and the congregational norms are very clear; moreover, it is a distinctive note of the Pauline charism, inasmuch as we have learned it, through

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<sup>1</sup> On this theme, it is worth rereading the annual Letter 1993-1994 of the then Superior General, Fr. Silvio Pignotti, on the wholeness of Pauline life.

Fr Alberione, from the Apostle Saint Paul himself. Missionary fervour and the yearning to bring the Gospel of Christ to all peoples and to the largest possible number of people is the motivation that energizes and gives impetus to all the other dimensions of our Pauline life (cf. 1 Co 9:15-27). In this vein, Fr. Alberione warned: *"The whole of formation has to be geared and arranged in a special way towards those studies which reflect the Pauline Family's own apostolate. Such a goal is to be borne in mind right from the outset of entry into our Institute, whether it be in school, or in counselling, meditations and preaching."* (UPS II, 193).

The fundamental orientation of our formation for mission in no way means, of course, giving exclusive priority to apostolic work, to the detriment of the possibility for us Paulines to acquire a firm intellectual academic qualification and specialization; rather, it must be ensured that this education finds concrete and practical application in the exercise of the apostolate. Unfortunately, in our Pauline contexts we tend to go to the extremes: either to harbor a certain fear or a certain distrust in facilitating an accurate formation for our young Paulines (where they are!), or to guarantee opportunities for formation and specialized studies, which result in degrees that end up in the archives without contributing to a real and greater efficiency in the apostolic task that each one of us must assume in the context of apostolic projects of the circumscription. In our Congregation, formation must always be an apostolic formation: "We must arrive at the "fruit" of study, that is, the apostolate" (Alberione, *Vademecum*, 286), and this throughout life, since the apostle, in order to respond adequately to the challenge of his mission, must never stop forming himself.

### ***Transformation of mentality***

At the heart of the process of preparation, celebration and further implementation of our next General Chapter we find the Apostle Paul's pressing exhortation to let ourselves be transformed by God's grace. This request, with regard to the theme of formation, in the context of the fourth challenge, is based on numerous relevant and important reasons, since "man is what he thinks"<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, formation, in seeking to make possible the configuration of the Pauline religious to Christ the Master, tends to consolidate in the person those beliefs and values that create a new mentality, that is, the typically Pauline mentality: *"The mind is an absorbing faculty. The mind has managing power. The mind is an endowing faculty. There is a mental hygiene. We need a constructive mental order. Social progress depends on mental progress. The development of the personality depends on the mind"*<sup>3</sup>.

The formation of the Christian and Pauline mentality, while involving our will and our commitment, is basically the fruit of God's action in us. In this regard, it is significant that Paul, after exhorting us not to conform to this world (Rom 12:2), uses a verbal form in passive imperative (*metamorphosis*) which can be translated as *"let yourselves be transformed/transfigured"*, or *"be transformed"*, which means to be another - in this case God Himself - the agent of such an action. What we have to do is to do the work of God, of the One who realizes in us the transformation or transfiguration through a renewal of the mind. The purpose of this transformation and renewal of the mind is to be able to discern God's will, what is good, pleasing and perfect. This Pauline teaching is reflected very well in Fr. Alberione's almost stubborn insistence on the search, to do always God's will as the only path of sanctification. In this sense, formation ultimately leads to holiness and configuration to Christ (cf. RF 39), since *"Jesus Christ is the Master who has best respected the human person, develops him in his natural and supernatural faculties, elevates him and directs him to share in God's time and eternity"*<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> G. Alberione, *Vademecum*, 249.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.*, n. 253.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.*, n. 326.

## ***Dialogue with the World***

To the extent that our formation in the Congregation involves all the faculties and dimensions of the person and in the proportion in which it is oriented and projected towards an ever greater commitment to our mission - beginning with the processes of openness to the action of God's grace in us that allows us to be transformed through a renewal of our mentality and configuration to Christ - only to that extent will we have Paulines capable of taking up the challenge of dialoguing with the world today, with its riches and miseries, with its joys and sorrows, with its successes and failures. Our Congregation has received from God through Fr. Alberione the great task of evangelization through the means and culture of communication, and therefore we cannot be indifferent to the complex realities faced by those who constitute the *raison d'être* of our charismatic service, that is, our interlocutors.

Rom 12:2 begins by warning us that we must not conform to this world, that is, that we must not live according to the style or model of this world. But this does not contradict the need to dialogue with this world, since, even though it is a complex dialogue, often laborious and difficult, it is always necessary, since it is precisely to this world - not to another - that we must offer our service of evangelization. In the area of formation we must always be attentive, because sometimes instead of helping to forge principles and values in the heart, we are content with raising external protective walls. From this point of view, too, one can fall into the risk of imbalance, either with an uncritical opening which leads to making the salt tasteless (cf. Mt 5:13) and losing the identity of the Pauline consecrated life in favor of a presumed insertion into the world; or, on the contrary, with closure and isolation for fear of "*attaching ourselves*" to the world. "*We must save the souls of today, not those of two centuries ago when there was neither radio nor television nor cinema nor other means. [...] We must help the souls of today in their dangers, in their circumstances.*"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> G. Alberione, *To the Sisters of Jesus Good Shepherd* (1965), p. 205.